

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

John 6:30-51

Year B - Proper 14, Text: John 6:35-51
Year B - Proper 14, Text: John 6:35, 41-51

Although there is overlap in the pericopes for Propers 13-15, taken from John 6, the major themes that surface within these passages take time to unravel. Prior to probing the present pericope, note the comments made in relation to the closing section of the pericope for Proper 13, John 6:24–35 (previous session).

Verses 6:30–31: The people now introduce the Passover theme of the manna that God provided for His people during the time of the wilderness wanderings. In Jesus' day, the rabbinic expectation was that when the Messiah eventually appeared, the manna would fall from the heavens once again.

Verses 6:32–35: Jesus tells His hearers that the “true bread” is not the bread that their forefathers ate during the wilderness wanderings. It is Jesus' Father who gives His people the True Bread from heaven, and that True Bread is Jesus and His Word. Only that True Bread can and does give life to the world. When the people ask Jesus to give them this bread always, Jesus tells them that He is that bread. Whoever comes to Jesus, the true Bread of Life, will never be hungry and will never be thirsty. [Up to v. 50, “bread of life” is a figure for God's revelation in Jesus. In Verses 51–58, the eucharistic theme plays a role.]

Verse 6:35: In asking for a sign, the crowds refer to the fact that God provided their forefathers with manna during their time in the wilderness (6:30–31; see also Exodus 16:4–35). Although the manna ceased to fall after the Israelites entered the land (Joshua 5:10–12), they believed that it would fall again when the Messianic Age broke in:

*And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time.
(2 Baruch 29:8)*

Some thought that although the manna was hidden by Jeremiah (2 Maccabees 2:4–8), it would reappear

miraculously at Passover in the last days. However, Jesus declares that He is the True Bread of Life come down from heaven and that He gives and sustains true life throughout time and eternity.

Verse 6:41: Many of Jesus' hearers cannot accept this claim. They begin to complain and murmur as their forefathers did during the wilderness wanderings; see also 6:60 and Exodus 16:2, 7–8. Some leave Him (6:66). Although the circle of Jesus' adherents diminishes, the disciples remain with Him (6:67–69).

Verse 6:42: The claim of Jesus' opponents that they know His origins (as a descendant of Joseph and Mary) is highly ironical. They do not see Him as One come down from heaven.

Verses 6:43–46: Jesus reminds His opponents of the prophecies that promised divine teaching such as His. However, they really do not know where He is from because they have not seen His Father.

Some comments by N.T. Wright in relation to v. 44:

C.S. Lewis was once interviewed by an American Christian journalist who was writing about well-known characters who had converted to Christianity during adult life. The theme was “decision.” He wanted to get Lewis to say how he had made “his decision.”

Unfortunately for the journalist's project, Lewis refused to put it in those terms. He hadn't “made a decision,” he said. God had closed in on him and he couldn't escape (although at the time he had badly wanted to). The closest he could get to using the language the reporter was interested in was to say, “I was decided upon.” In his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, Lewis describes it in a more evocative phrase, “God's compulsion is our liberation.”

Verses 6:47–48: Eternal life is not merely something that we shall “get” one day in the distant future. It is something that we possess, enjoy, and live now. Jesus' brothers and sisters have already been given the “divine passport” that declares them to be citizens of

heaven. As such, they are to seek to live now as they shall then.

Jesus promises those who come to Him in faith that He will raise them up on the last day (Verses 39–40, 44) — the sure hope that is on offer throughout John’s Gospel. However, “eternal life” is also the manner of life that God’s people are to pursue in this present world. They are to seek to share the inner life of Jesus that is on offer at once to anyone who believes. “Eternal” denotes a life that is available in the here and now, as well as after death. It is the life of the age to come — the new life that God has always planned to give to His world. This life will be shared by all who taste of the Living Bread.

Verses 6:49–50: Jesus’ opponents are so proud of their ancestors and of the manna they ate during the exodus-wilderness events. However, that manna did not stop their fathers from dying, and it did not keep them faithful to God.

Verse 6:51: The life-giving bread, and indeed living bread, is Jesus’ own flesh. The reference is to feeding in faith on all who Jesus was and is, and all that He achieved for the salvation for humanity. The eucharistic imagery revealed here shows that Jesus himself is the foundational “means of grace.”