

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This weekend is the twelfth anniversary of an event you may not even remember, but in mid-August, 2003, there was a major and massive malfunction of the so-called electrical power grid.

Fifty-five million people were plunged into total darkness, including ten million people in the Canadian province of Ottawa. This blackout covered an area from Michigan and Ohio all the way to the East Coast of the United States.

Though we in central Indiana escaped the great blackout back in 2003, there are people today who are warning that such an event could happen again, especially if we don't make major improvements in our nation's energy infrastructure.

But here's a question somewhat related: when was the last time you personally experienced an emotional and spiritual power failure? When did you last feel so thoroughly drained that you just wanted to stay in bed, or not leave the house?

Life today is quite fast-paced and demanding, and in spite of our technological and scientific progress as a society, life has not really gotten any easier.

Human life may be projected to last longer in the 21st century, and our many modern conveniences will likely continue to multiply, but we all know that the day-to-day struggles of people, including us, will persist.

Personally, I believe that Jesus knew that some things would just never change. He knew people would always be hungry. Food would always be important.

And there would always be a certain spiritual longing deep inside every human being. We can only imagine how much our lives are improved over what it was like for Jesus' disciples and the people of that time.

Most of us can only speculate at how nice we have it today, compared to peoples in other lands. But, in some ways, our needs today are no different than those of people in first-century Israel. Our needs in the United States are, in some ways, no different than those of people now living in the poorest countries of the world.

Jesus' words transcend the centuries and traverse national boundaries: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

We hunger for food and thirst for drink, yet they only fulfill our needs for the present. They keep us alive, here and now. But Jesus teaches his followers to eat from the bread of heaven and He says it will keep us alive forever.

Perhaps you remember being prodded to eat as a child. “Unless you eat your peas, you won’t be allowed to play with your friends after dinner.” “If you don’t eat your liver, young lady, you won’t grow up to be strong and healthy.”

“If you don’t drink your milk, your bones will be weak and your teeth will fall out.” And just think of the number of times we were subtly told through television advertisements: “Unless you eat Wonder Bread, your young body won’t be built strongly 12 ways!”

What is it about food? We’ve got to have it, but let’s face it, some people eat to live while others live to eat. Just look at what’s happened. Go to any of those giant bookstores and there’s a whole section devoted to cookbooks.

Research “restaurants” by zip code online and you can always find an abundance of places to eat. There are racks of magazines that tell us how to prepare and present food in the most appealing ways. If that’s not enough, there’s the Food Channel on TV, dedicated to giving us 24-hour access to anything we’d ever want to know about food, cooking, and all the best places to eat throughout the world.

Life comes from life. Think about it. Everything we eat was at one time alive. Life must be given for life to be sustained. A plant or animal lays down its life so that we might live. Even milk and eggs must be given up.

For us to eat, for our lives to be nurtured, a sacrifice must be made. We live in a world of give and take, and let’s face it, the human race is made up of “takers” while just about every other living thing is a giver.

Unless you eat, you die. That’s the balance of nature. Unless you eat, this organism we call the human body will shut down. When we eat, a transfer takes place. Molecules of one life become a part of another life. Life is actually shared from one life-source to another.

In Jesus, God shared our life. He was into our world through natural birth. He was nourished with the same kind of food we eat and grew into the same physical form we share. God was able to experience life as we know it with all the joys, and all the sorrows, all the pain and all the healing. In Jesus, God became one of us.

Following Jesus’ death and resurrection, God’s Holy Spirit came into our lives. Now, we are able to share God’s life. Just as Jesus was able to experience the life of a human, the Holy Spirit enables us to experience God. We can know his thoughts and his ways. We can sense his peace and his power. We are able to have a vision of his kingdom and his eternity.

When Jesus talks about the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood, he is describing that shared life, that transfer that takes place. Jesus receives his life from God the Father, the ultimate source. Jesus then passes that life, eternal life, on to us.

And he's telling us that unless we eat from his "Life-Source," we really have no life at all. Life comes from life. Unless you eat, you die. A plant or animal lays down its life so that we might live.

But, Jesus tells us that when you eat that kind of food, you will still eventually die. It's temporary food for temporary and transitory life.

Eternal life comes from eternal life. Unless you eat of the living bread from heaven, you die. When we share in Christ's death, we share in his resurrection. Through communion with him and his church, his eternal life-giving qualities are passed on to us. Unless you eat ... the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood ... you have no life in you.

There's a story about a merchant who sent his servant to a market in the streets of Damascus. When the servant returned, trembling and agitated, he said, "While I was at the market, I was jostled by someone in the crowd.

I turned to look and saw that Death had jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Master, please lend me your horse so I can escape. I want to ride to Samarra. There I will hide, so that Death cannot find me."

Later that same day, the merchant himself was in the marketplace, and he also saw Death in the crowd.

He said to her, "Why did you startle my servant this morning by making a threatening gesture?" Death replied, "That was no threatening gesture; I simply jumped because I was surprised. I was startled to see your servant in Damascus, for we have an appointment tonight in Samarra."

It's wonderful that there is so much available to us today to prolong our lives and make living as comfortable as possible, for as long as possible. We can cure diseases, replace body parts, and adapt to all sorts of conditions.

We do everything that we can to outsmart death, but somewhere down the road death always catches up with us. We can give ourselves that false sense of security by jumping on that horse and riding away to hide.

But eventually we ride right into the face of death. And unless we have eaten properly, unless we feed on the living bread, we will surely die.

To the uninformed listener, Jesus' words might sound strange, like an old "zombie" movie, or a vampire story. But Jesus' words are not science fiction. They are words to the faithful. Jesus tells us that we live by receiving life from him. He had to sacrifice his life so that our lives could go on. Life comes from life.

Perhaps you've heard the story of a mistake made by a florist. It really puts things in proper perspective.

When a legal firm sent flowers to an associate who had just taken a new position in a different office, the card was inadvertently mixed-up with another order.

The legal firm informed the florist that the flowers they received were improperly labeled, “Deepest Sympathy.” Hearing that, the florist cried out in great distress. “Good heavens,” she exclaimed, “then the flowers that went to that funeral said, ‘Congratulations on Your New Location!’”

Eating has its benefits. Unless you eat, you will die. So you eat to live. Eat the living bread Jesus offers and you live forever. You will die one day and if you have eaten the living bread, you will change locations.

You will move from the presence of sin to the presence of the most holy God; you will move from what is earthly to what is heavenly; you will move from that which is temporary to that which is eternal. And it all comes from eating a little bread ... from the right person. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

Alan Goertemiller, Pastor
Pilgrim Lutheran Church of Indianapolis, Inc.