

August 11, 2024
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 6:35–51

JESUS IS THE LIVING BREAD COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN.

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

We talk a lot about *sanctification*, but it can be a hard concept. The word *sanctification* means: “... **causing someone to belong completely to God, holiness.**” (ANLEX, 31) We Lutheran Christians define *sanctification* in a *wide* and in a *narrow* sense. In its *wide* sense, *sanctification* is everything that the Holy Spirit does in the lives of believers through God’s means of grace: creating faith, forgiving your sins, and regenerating you into a new person. In the *wide* sense, God made you holy and set you apart as His own child in either the waters of Holy Baptism or in the hearing of the Gospel. In the *narrow* sense, *sanctification* is your lifelong process of spiritual growth and good works, beginning the moment you were called to faith... and it continues until brought to completion on the Last Day.

Five times in our Gospel text this morning, Jesus uses the words, “*come to me.*” (cf: John 6:35, 37, 44, 45) He bids you and begs you – come unto Him so that He might satisfy you. God does not cast aside sinners who recognize their sin and hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God. Come to Jesus. To come to Jesus is to trust and believe in Him for the forgiveness of your sins, life, and eternal salvation.

But the difficult thing for you and me sinners to get through our thick heads is – coming to Jesus and trusting in Him is not our own work. It’s God’s work. It’s not something you and I do – but what God does for you and in you. By your own reason and strength, you cannot believe in Jesus Christ your Lord or come to Him. No one comes to Jesus or believes in Him unless the Father draws Him. (cf: John 6:44)

In our Gospel text, the crowds are coming to Jesus. By the grace of God, they locate Jesus on the other side of the sea from where He just fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus desires that they come to Him in faith and believe in Him, but they’re looking for free bread. They’re following Jesus, not because they recognized His miracles as signs pointing to the fact that He is God in the flesh of man. No. They followed because He filled their bellies and they want more. (cf: John 6:26)

Of course, food for the belly is important – and God provides for your physical and material needs. He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. (cf: Psalm 145:16) Jesus taught us to pray, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” (cf: Matthew 6:11) In Luther’s explanation of the Lord’s Prayer, he teaches us that “*daily bread*” is everything we need to satisfy our bodily

needs in this life. (cf: SC, III, 14) But Jesus came to give so much more. He is the source of eternal life – eternal life with God in heaven for all who believe.

Hunger is caused by the lack of bread and food. Thirst is caused by the lack of fluids to drink. Hunger and thirst leaves the natural man starving and parched with an empty yearning to be filled. That's what faith looks like before God works in you: empty hands, empty mouths, empty bellies. And Jesus bids you and begs you – come unto Him so that He might satisfy you. So God the Father takes the first step to draw you to the Triune God so that you can believe. God does all the work. According to St Paul in his letter to the Colossians:

“... you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him...” (Colossians 2:13)

To the Ephesians Paul writes:

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4–5)

Paul didn't say you were sick. He didn't say you were crippled or incapacitated. He said you were **dead!** Dead in your trespasses. What can a dead man do? Nothing! A dead man cannot resuscitate himself back to life – let alone come to Jesus. You were conceived and born sinful, turned inward toward yourself, deaf and blind to God and His Word.... dead in trespasses and sin. And from the foundation of the world, Christ Jesus saw you in your spiritual hunger and thirst. He saw your brokenness, sin, guilt, and shame as an enemy of God. (cf: Romans 5:10) So He came down from heaven and gave Himself over to suffer a horrible bloody death on the cross – in your place so that He might save you from sin, death, and the grave – and restore your relationship with God the Father.

So when Jesus says, ***“come to me,”*** the Holy Spirit is working through His Word to create faith. He's speaking to, not just sick or crippled, but to you and me poor miserable sinners... sinners dead in trespasses, bidding you to receive His gifts won for you on Calvary's cross which impart to you new life in Him. When He says, ***“come to me,”*** He is saying to you:

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)

He says:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” (John 6:37)

He says:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:44)

These are Jesus' promises to you and to all who hear His Word and believe. He fed the crowds with bread and fish in the wilderness, something Moses had done for Israel for forty years. But something is new in Christ Jesus. Moses gave bread from heaven, the manna in the wilderness, and still the people died. Manna could **sustain** them, but it could not **save** them. Elijah ate bread in the wilderness too, and it sustained him for forty days. (cf: 1 Kings 19:1–8) But the bread that

Jesus gives is not like the bread that fell from the sky for Moses, or the bread that the angel brought Elijah under the broom tree. The bread that Jesus gives is Himself. He says:

“I am the bread that came down from heaven.” (John 6:41)

But the Jews refuse to believe. They didn’t see Jesus as the life-giving Bread who comes from the Father but a mere man, the adopted Son of Joseph, born of Mary whom they knew. (cf: John 6:42)

Jesus is not merely the adopted son of Joseph but the Son of the living God in heaven who is the source of true life... eternal life. It’s not about you coming to Jesus – but the Father giving you to Jesus and **sanctifying** you – making you a holy child of God. It’s God drawing you to Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit through hearing the Gospel of Christ. The Spirit creates faith in you, taking you from death to life. Jesus is the Living Bread come down from heaven to feed and save your sin sick soul and for His sake, you are made holy before God – meaning, you’re **sanctified**... **sanctified** in the **wide** sense. He will raise you up on the Last Day and give you eternal life. And this is as sure and certain as He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.

Sanctification in the **narrow** sense is different. It’s the lifelong spiritual growth that follows the call to faith and trusting in Jesus for salvation. By God’s grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian cooperates in this work. St Paul writes:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works...” (Ephesians 2:8–9)

But then he then continues to say:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

You were created to do good works. Your works don’t save you. But your good works follow faith.

“.. . it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
(Philippians 2:13)

In our epistle text St Paul has already proclaimed the Gospel to the Ephesian Christians. Two chapters earlier he attested that you’re saved by grace alone – not by works. He knows that the Holy Spirit came to you in the waters of Baptism, **sanctifying** you, regenerating you into a new creation, and giving you faith. He knows you’re **sanctified** for the sake of Jesus life, death, and resurrection from the dead... and because of the undeserved gracious gifts bestowed unto you at the font, Paul now exhorts you to live a God pleasing life, saying:

“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.” (Ephesians 4:17)

What is the futility of your mind? Grab your bulletin... browse through the epistle and pick out your sins. They’re all listed there: sensuality, greed, impurity, deceitful desires, telling lies about your neighbor, anger, and corrupt talk. Then Paul says to you, fellow redeemed:

“... that is not the way you learned Christ! ... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.”
(Ephesians 4:20–22)

Repent. Drown the old man in baptismal waters and:

“... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:23–24)

No longer reject the Holy Spirit and God’s gifts but rather:

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 4:32 – 5:2)

God doesn’t need your good works – but your neighbor does. God has prepared them beforehand for you. Can you do it alone? Of course not. The old man is strong and stubborn – but – your baptism is ***stronger***. IN Christ, you are declared not guilty of your sins. You’re ***justified***. You’re ***sanctified*** by the Holy Spirit and He strengthens you to live a God pleasing life until either Christ returns, or you die a physical death. In the meantime, await the Bread of Life come down from heaven who ***will*** raise you up on the Last Day. Jesus says:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51)

Brothers and sister in Christ. Jesus bids you, ***“Come to me.”*** Just as the angel of the Lord touched Elijah under the broom tree saying:

“Arise and eat...” “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” (1 Kings 19:5, 8)

The journey is too great for you too. Living a God pleasing life in this broken and sinful world is too great for you – so Jesus bids you, come. Eat of His body. Drink of His blood... to strengthen you on your journey. To forgive your sins and keep you in the true faith until He raises you up on the Last Day when you’ll recline with your Savior at the feast in His kingdom that has no end.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.