

August 4, 2024
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 6:22-35 (Exodus 16:2–15)

I AM the Bread of Life.

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

Today's Gospel text is the being of three weeks where our lessons will be taken from what's known as the "***Bread of Life Discourse***" in the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel. (cf: John 6:22–58) The Discourse is an extended dialog between Jesus and the crowd following Him – and then – the dialog between Jesus and His disciples.

The crowds have been persistent and determined in following Jesus. When He and His disciples attempted sail away to a desolate place for rest and recuperation, the crowds ran ahead on foot and were waiting on the shore. (cf: Mark 6:33–34) When Jesus saw the great crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began to teach them many things.

As the day grew late, the people were getting hungry. Rather than sending the crowds away, Jesus had the disciples gather all the food they could find – which was only five loaves of bread and two fish. But with Jesus' miraculous multiplication, 5,000 men, plus women and children, were fed, filled, and satisfied, leaving twelve baskets of leftovers. (cf: John 6:1–13) Unlike any conference held today, there was no registration fee to hear the speaker. Jesus' Gospel words of eternal life are free. And no charge for the meal. Of course the people were satisfied. Who doesn't like a free meal? Soup kitchens are always busy. Food banks struggle to keep their shelves filled. Free food to fill the belly. No money or labor required. Just eat your fill and waddle off to your easy chair, loosen your belt, and take a nap.

With everyone fed, Jesus sent the disciples ahead to sail to the other side of the sea. He would dismiss the crowd and go up the mountain for some private time to prayer. (cf: Mark 6:45–46) Later that night, just before dawn, the disciples were sailing against a strong headwind, when Jesus came walking across the water. When they saw Jesus, they were terrified because they thought He was a ghost, but Jesus calmed their fears, got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. They were astounded. (cf: Mark 6:48–52) Even though they had heard Jesus' teaching and witnessed His mighty miracles, and now seeing His power over the wind as sea, they still don't grasp who He really is, and that the rule and reign of God is in the man Jesus.

As our Gospel text begins, it's the morning after the miraculous feeding. The crowd who ate and were satisfied, were looking for Jesus. They knew His disciples left in the only boat on that side of the sea – and they knew that He had not entered the boat. When other boats arrived, the crowds got into the boats and went find Jesus. And it's only by the grace of God that they find

Jesus. He desires that they believe in Him. When they ask how long He had been there, as He often does – He doesn't answer the question but redirects the conversation to a greater teaching. He knows their hearts. From our text:

Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.' (John 6:26)

In the original language, the words “***truly, truly***” are pronounced “***amen, amen***,” and are transliterated from the Hebrew word “***amen***,” which means “***sure, reliable, and valid***.” (TDNT, 335–336) So, every time Jesus says “***Truly, truly, I say to you***,” He is saying that His words are spoken “... *with the total authority of God and, as One who presents truth... which is final, absolute, and perfectly [reveals] ...God's will.*” (Weinrich, John 1:1–7:1, Concordia Commentary, 664–665)

Jesus' words are true. He knows that the people followed Him because He filled their bellies – not because of His “***signs***.” They saw Jesus as a meal ticket and bread machine, a free source of food. Who needs to work when bread and fish can be multiplied on demand? They had eaten the loaves and were satisfied – but they had not understood the “***signs***.” (cf: John 6:2, 14, 26)

St. John uses the word “***sign***” in his Gospel to refer to the miracles of Jesus. What does a ***sign*** do? A ***sign*** imparts information. A ***sign*** points you toward something. John calls Jesus' miracles ***signs*** because His miracles point to Jesus' true identity as God in human flesh dwelling among His people, able to feed both body and soul. His ***signs*** are intended so that those who see the ***signs*** might be drawn to faith in the One who forgives sins and sustains both body and soul unto eternal life. But these people were so focused on the free food that they missed seeing the ***sign***. Their bellies were filled – and – their souls were not a matter of concern. So Jesus said to them:

“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” (John 6:27)

The physical food of the world perishes. That's why store-bought bread contains so many preservatives. Even the manna/bread sent by God to the grumbling Israelites in the wilderness would breed worms and stink the next day. (cf: Exodus 16:2–21) God wanted them to trust in Him for their daily bread. Like you and me, they were slow learners. Like the Israelites and the crowds in our text, you and I desire the bread that sustains in this life – not the bread that sustains unto the life to come.

You work for the bread that perishes. The bread for your belly. The bread that is gone when the supply-chain is broken. The bread that is subject to insects and inflation. The bread that cannot rescue you from your sinful condition or from death. It's the bread that you eat until you can eat no more. The bread that fills you one minute and leaves you hungry the next. Of course, taking care of your physical health is important. But food for the body is not as critical as food for the soul. Early Church Father St. Augustine once said:

“Take care of your body as if you were going to live forever; take care of your soul as if you were going to die tomorrow.” (<https://catholicinsight.com/the-true-saint-augustine/>)

Unless Jesus returns really soon, your physical health is going to one day, fade into bodily death. Where is your soul going on that day? Eternal life or eternal death?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a bread which nourishes the soul and preserves the soul unto eternal life. That bread alone is worth laboring for, and the good news is, Christ Jesus gives it to you. Some of the people in the crowd liked the idea of laboring for this eternal food. They wanted to know what they must do to be doing the works of God. It's part of the sinful human nature – desiring to perform some sort of work to earn salvation. But Jesus corrects the crowd. The only thing a person can do is to believe in the One whom God has sent – Christ Jesus. And this is a mystery.

True faith is produced and given by God. Not because of any special merit or labor on your part, but He gives it freely, out of His divine love, mercy, and grace. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, faith clings to the persons and promises of God and Christ. At His Baptism, God the Father set His seal on Jesus. The sealing indicates that the Father has specified Jesus as the One who has full and absolute authority to act on behalf of the Father. Whatever Christ Jesus enacts is nothing other than the work of the Father and bears the Father's intent and authority.

In His rich love, mercy, and grace, Christ has enacted His Means of Grace... His means of delivering the goods of His forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation – to you and for you. He gave you the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit either in Baptism or in the hearing of the Gospel. His Gospel Word is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. (cf: Romans 1:16) Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (cf: Romans 10:17) Jesus says:

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16)

Without a mouth, you can't eat bread. Without faith, you can't eat the Bread of Life. Anyone can hear God's Word proclaimed, study the Bible, know the Scriptures backward and forward – but without faith – you'll never receive the salvation that is for you.

Without faith, you can be baptized and have the certificate to prove it, you can have all the gifts of salvation that Christ won for you, but if you don't trust it, draw on it, lay claim to it when the devil, the world, and your sinful conscience troubles you, then Baptism does you no good. It's like having physical bread but never ingesting it. It's like having a million dollars in the bank and never withdrawing any of it.

Without faith, you can eat the bread that is Christ's body and drink the wine that is His blood, and still leave the table spiritually hungry, craving the forgiveness, life, and salvation that these gifts bring. Faith receives and digests the gifts of Christ. Apart from faith, you can eat the bread, but it does you harm instead of good. (cf: 1 Corinthians 11:27–29)

Jesus says:

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

The manna God gave in the wilderness was a foreshadowing of a future meal. It provided a pattern and picture for the true bread that God gives in the sending of His Son. It isn't bread you work for, but bread that is given you as a gift of grace. It isn't bread that fills your temporal hunger pangs but bread that goes straight to your soul, a bread that will raise you up on the Last Day. The bread Jesus multiplied beyond measure for over 5,000 was also a foretaste of the feast to come in His Kingdom which has no end. Christ is not only the giver of the gift, but He is also the gift Himself. The Bread of Life comes to you wherever the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Sacraments are administered according to His institution. If your spiritual life isn't nourished, the gift of faith born in you at Baptism will wither and die.

That's why you come to worship each week... so you're spiritually fed and nourished. You come to receive our Lord's forgiveness in His Holy Absolution. You come to be reminded of your baptismal promises. You come so God can create and strengthen your faith in the preaching of His Word. You come to receive Jesus Body and Blood – given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. You come and pray not only *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* but also pray, *"Give us this day – the Bread of Life."*

As a Baptized child of God, by daily contrition and repentance, drown your old Adam so the new man in faith can arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. You arise a child of God, not only with physical life, but a God given, regenerated, Spiritual life prepared to do the works that He has prepared in advance for you to do.

Amen.

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