

Jesus is the Bread of Life

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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

During the past few Sundays, our Gospel accounts have described the feeding of over five thousand with only five loaves of bread and two fish at Bethsaida on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee, and then last week we heard how Jesus took a shortcut across the sea by walking on the water and scaring the wits out of His disciples as they traveled to Capernaum on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. In the Gospel account for this Sunday, we hear what happened in Capernaum after those two events. While the previous accounts were from the Gospel of Mark, today, we hear from the Gospel of St. John. The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is found in all four Gospels. It is one of the few events that is recorded in all four Gospels. It was significant not only because of the sheer number of people who experienced Jesus' compassion but also because it was a clear sign or clue to the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and God. But the Gospel of John is the only one that gives the most detailed account of what happened next after Jesus' two miraculous events of feeding over 5,000 people and His walk on the water.

The sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John has a special theme. In this chapter, Jesus identifies Himself by the first of His five "***I Am***" pronouncements. (The words, "*I Am*" are the name God gave to Himself as He spoke from the burning bush to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Moses asked God by what name He should be called. God answered saying, "***I Am who I Am.***" The Hebrew

word has come to us as Yahweh and means “*the Lord.*”) Jesus used “***I Am***” to describe Himself. I am the light of the world (John 8); I Am the door or gate and I Am the Good Shepherd (both found in John 10, and I Am the resurrection and the life in John 11 spoken at the resurrection of Lazarus. When Jesus said those words, “***I Am,***” it was a subtle clue to the people who Jesus really was. Jesus was saying He was God Himself in the flesh. He was the Messiah. You would have thought that coupled with the miraculous works that Jesus and His disciples had done the people would have figured that out. They didn’t. They missed the sign. They missed the clue.

Our Gospel today picks up the day after the feeding of the five thousand. Some of the people who ate with those five thousand came back the next day and began looking for Jesus so they could have breakfast. But He was nowhere to be found. They had no clue as to where He was. They were puzzled when they could not find Him. They remembered seeing His disciples getting into a boat but without Jesus the day before. But, with the exception of the boat that the disciples had taken, all the other boats were still there. So, they expected that Jesus would still be somewhere in the vicinity. They didn’t know that Jesus had walked out on the water and joined the disciples in their boat during the night. It didn’t take long for these people to realize that they had lost track of Jesus. So, when some boats came near the shore from Tiberius, they took the opportunity to go to the other side of the sea to find Jesus. They landed at Capernaum and lo and behold, there was Jesus.

Now they were able to determine where Jesus was but they still had no clue as to who He was. And they had no clue how Jesus could already be on the other side of the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum. When they found Him, they were full of questions. Notice the first question they ask Him is not about the miraculous feeding of over 5,000 people or about who He really

was, they began with, ***“Rabbi, when did you come here?”*** It is fairly clear that Jesus’ presence in Capernaum still was a puzzle to them. And, notice, Jesus never did answer their question. Instead, He focused on the reason they asked the question. His answer to them was: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor 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.”***

Jesus understood the hearts of the people. Jesus was saying they were here for the wrong reason. These words are a warning to us too. What is the reason for our faith in Jesus? They were concerned about Jesus’ location and means of transportation because He had fed them with free food and they wanted to be where He was the next time that happened. They did not see that the feeding of the 5,000 was a sign of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. Instead, they saw Jesus as a free meal ticket – someone who could make their life on this earth a whole lot easier. They only saw Jesus as a means to survive in this temporal life. Their focus was stuck on the physical bread, not the sign that was flashing, like our neon signs today, in front of them about the true meaning of the bread and who it was that had given it to them. Jesus had something better to offer them than food for their stomachs. Jesus used their misguided thinking as a means to teach them about who He was and why they needed Him.

That reminds me of this story. There was a very devout ranch hand who was working out on the range mending fences. While he was working, he lost his Bible. He had no idea where it was and didn’t have a clue as to where to start looking for it. Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth. The ranch hand raised his eyes heavenward and

exclaimed, *"It's a miracle!"* *"Not really,"* said the sheep. *"Your name is written inside the cover."*

Do you see the connection here? It was not a miracle that the Bible was returned. Anyone could have done that since the owner's name was written inside the cover. The miracle was the talking sheep. No one expected that AND the ranch hand didn't recognize it. Like the feeding of the 5,000, while that was a significant event, a miracle, the point was about the one who performed the miracle. Now that may have been a baaaad example but I hope you saw the relationship. I also hope God will forgive me for my sheepish example.

There are still a lot of people who treat Jesus as a dispenser of worldly things. Now to be sure few people in our culture look to Jesus for free food like the people in the Gospel reading, although there are some. But food is not a big problem for most people in our culture. However, this does not mean that there are not many other earthly desires that we wish God would fulfill. Now, the problem is not that people look to Jesus for their needs. Jesus Himself tells us to pray ***"Give us this day our daily bread"*** and we are about to do that in a few moments. The problem comes when we see this as God's primary function. And today, there are some very popular preachers who tell their listeners to trust that God will give them all sorts of good things in life. Here are just a few of the quotes I found on the Internet:

- *"God can cause opportunity to find you. He has unexpected blessings where you suddenly meet the right person, or suddenly your health improves, or suddenly you're able to pay off your house. That's God shifting things in your favor."*
- *"Obedience to God is the pathway to the life you really want to live."*

- *“Poverty is from the devil and God wants all Christians prosperous.”*
- *“Poverty is caused by sin and disobeying the word of god.”*

These quotes are from some very popular television preachers who teach that worldly wealth and success are a reward for those who obey God. They teach about a god who is like a great big vending machine in the sky. You do your part and then God will give you what you want.

Many people see earthly wealth and well-being as a sign that they are right with God. Many people believe that if they dot all the “I’s” and cross all the “T’s,” then God will make them healthy, wealthy, and wise. This means that if they are not healthy, wealthy, and wise, that something must be missing and they need to find out what that is. People have the false hope that somehow, they can live a life that will please God who will reward them with earthly blessings. This is working righteousness. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that we can do nothing to please God because of our sinful nature, but God, in His grace, freely gives us, not what we want, but what we need.

You can tell that the crowd around Jesus thought this way. They asked, ***“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”*** They knew that they were poor. They knew that their life was a struggle just as ours is a struggle. Therefore, they thought that there was something they could do in order to procure God’s material blessings. They were looking for a way to work themselves in God’s favor so that their life on earth could be easier. Jesus answered them, ***“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”***

Instead of talking about the works of man, Jesus spoke of the work of God. It is the action of God to work faith in the one who was sent from God. And right here, Jesus implied that He Himself is the one who was sent from God. In His own words, we learn that it is not man's works that save, but God's work that saves. Grace is a gift and only available by faith.

Despite the glimmer of awareness that seemed to dawn on the people, they still did not catch on. We see this in the crowd's reply to Jesus' teaching showing the true hardness of their hearts: ***"Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*** Can you imagine? This all was happening the day after Jesus had just fed 5,000 plus people and they still wanted a sign. They wanted a sign that should cause them to believe in Him. This also happened after Jesus had already performed many other signs. He, and even His disciples, had healed the sick, driven out demons, given sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, sound bodies to the lame, even life to the dead, and yet these people asked for a sign.

In our culture, we use the term as a sign of the times in a negative sense. We see antagonism toward each other, or fires burning up half the western states of the country, or politicians who quibble and ignore the needs of the people they represent and we say, *"it's a sign of the times."* But for us Christians, there is only one sign. The sign is the cross. This is the sign of our times. The sign of our redemption and forgiveness by Jesus Christ. It is our sign of all time.

The crowd did not see that all the things that were being taught by Jesus and the truths that He was providing were based on metaphors. Bread, hunger, and eating when put together, they're all about Jesus and believing in Him. They look at Jesus'

reference to food and remembered how God fed His people in the wilderness with manna. Today's Old Testament reading is the back story to our Gospel. Jesus responds to them: ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you this bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*** Jesus makes it clear that Moses was merely God's instrument. In reality, it was God the Father who gave them the MANNA (the bread) from heaven, the food that sustained them in their travels in the wilderness until they reached the Promised Land.

With Jesus' reply, He began to show that He Himself is the true bread from heaven. He is the one who gives life to a sinful world. As we come to the last verse in today's Gospel, Jesus makes this crystal clear. Jesus said to them, ***"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*** The last reference to never being thirsty recalls Jesus' discourse with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Jesus told her: ***"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."*** Jesus is the source of living water and living bread. Gifts of life eternal from God Himself through Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit brings us to this Bread of Life, He is producing faith in us. Those who come to Jesus can only come by the power of the Holy Spirit in faith. There is no way to Christ other than faith. Through faith, Christ is closer to us than even a mother to her child. In faith, He is always with us and will never forsake us.

Today's Gospel just touches on the radical relationship that we have with Christ who is the Bread of Life sent by God from heaven. Jesus was greater than Moses. Jesus gave His life on a cross for the whole world. The Bread of Life was greater than

the manna. The manna only lasted a day. The Bread of Life lasts forever. No matter what may happen in temporal time, by faith, we have the “Bread of Life” for all time. Manna sustained temporal life. Jesus sustains eternal life.

During the next few weeks, as we continue through John 6, this teaching of Jesus as the Bread of Life from Heaven will get deeper and even more radical. We will learn even more about the salvation that Jesus gives to us as the Bread of Life from Heaven.

I want to end today with a story. A man was on his death bed. It was a Saturday. His family had come to say goodbye. One of his sons was a pastor. The dying man looked at his son and said, *“Go home. Prepare for your service tomorrow. Put the finishing touches on your sermon and preach to your people about faith in Jesus. If I die while you are gone, you will know where to find me.”* That is faith and this is about faith. That man shared his faith as he lay dying with confidence and assurance to his family. He knew about eternal life and the means to that end. Eternal life is real. Eternal life makes a difference. The life of this world and the things of this world will fail us. But the life that God gives us through Jesus Christ will never fail us. In the end, it is eternal life that is more important than anything here in our temporal time here on earth.

Today, as you pray ***“Give us this day our daily bread”***, think about the two levels of prayer you are praying. One is on the temporal level and will sustain you in this temporal life. The other is on the spiritual level and will sustain you for all eternity. One is fleeting, but the other is everlasting. Both give life, but one guarantees life in heaven with the source of life for all eternity. May you be so blessed to ask for both and receive both with thanksgiving. Amen.