

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost; August 11, 2024  
+ John 6:24-35 +  
“Feast on the Bread of Life”

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Jesus answered them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

So they said to him, “What should we do to carry out the works of God?”

Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent.”

Then they asked him, “So what miraculous sign are you going to do, that we may see it and believe in you? What miraculous sign are you going to perform? Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus said to them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said to him, “give us this bread all the time!”

“I am the Bread of Life,” Jesus told them. “The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Do you remember the first time you ever went to an all you can eat buffet? As adults, those places kind of lose their appeal. With an increase in age and experience usually comes the important lesson that *quality* is to be preferred over *quantity*...but not when you're a kid! As a child, those places were like a dream come true. No longer were your choices limited just to the main course your parents lovingly served up for dinner that night; never again would you hear those dreaded words, “You’ll eat *that*, or you won’t eat *at all!*” No, not here, because this was a magical place. The choices seemed limitless. Start with some pizza. Grab a few tacos on your way to the steak bar and then the final push when you finish it all off with an ice cream cone that threatened to buckle under its own weight. That’s the appeal of an all you can eat buffet: you have a limitless supply of good things, and you’ll never leave unsatisfied.

As strange as it might sound, it seems as though some of the people following Jesus through Galilee saw him as an Old Country Buffet or Goldan Corral. With a few loaves of bread and a couple small fish, Jesus fed a crowd of over 5,000 people with leftovers to spare. In a place where many people lived hand-to-mouth, the miracle of this feeding meant providence, stability, and a limitless supply of food to satisfy their daily

hunger. In fact, the people were so excited at this prospect that they intended to drag Jesus to Jerusalem and plop a crown on his head, so they could enjoy this giver of bread and all he could do for them. But they missed the point.

Jesus didn't come to bring bread. He came to be bread. In his "Bread of Life Discourse" in John 6, Jesus turns the focus away from physical bread that satisfies hunger for a time and points us to the true, life-giving bread that brings eternal joy and satisfaction: himself. He is the Bread of Life that satisfies every one of our needs in this life and the next. But the people following him wanted to see another miraculous sign, once again betraying their misunderstanding. "You know, our ancestors ate manna in the desert. Moses fed our forefathers for forty years! What sign will you provide?" Challenging Jesus to compete with Moses in Miraculous Bread Production Derby! And Jesus didn't miss the opportunity to teach them and us a very important lesson: being hungry for all the wrong things will only leave you even emptier inside.

**Jesus answered them, "Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father has placed his seal of approval."** Sometimes food can serve a purpose greater than simply filling a stomach for a few hours. Think about it. When you and your loved ones are gathered around the Thanksgiving table, what are you celebrating? Turkey and stuffing? Or rejoicing in God's blessings, especially those blessings you call family sitting and eating with you? Or how about a wedding banquet - is that just a celebration for the sake of prime rib? Or is it the celebration of lives together and hopefully new lives, and also a preview of the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven? Sometimes food can serve a purpose greater than simply filling a stomach for a few hours, but the people following Jesus missed the point. John had it right in the prologue to his Gospel when he said, **The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.**

If I'm being honest, I really have no right to be so hard on those people for missing the point and working for food that spoils, and neither do you. We hear that same promise of Jesus, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."** This is the food that endures to eternal life that Jesus promises to give us: all that he is and all that he has, he says it's yours! But like those people following Jesus, it comes so naturally to focus on all the things I'd like to have to make my life more comfortable and, in the process, we leave the Bread of Life in the breadbox. I push the Bread of Life aside in favor of something that looks a little more appetizing right now. The Bread of Life is pushed aside so that I can pour all my time, energy, and effort into what...my career? As if my stockpile of earthly stuff could eventually get so big that it might yield some spiritual benefit? The Bread of Life is pushed aside so Christians can focus more closely on giving kids and grandkids opportunities we never had - even if those opportunities take them away from time spent receiving the Bread of Life in worship and family devotion.

Perhaps what's most shameful and embarrassing of all is this: if I honestly consider all

the things that I've put ahead of Jesus' gift of himself in the gospel, it's embarrassing to say how little I settle for. Some food in the fridge, bills paid, a few extra dollars after all's said and done. This is what I work for? An extra hour of sleep on a Sunday morning or another episode on Netflix instead of the living and life-giving message of the gospel?

There's a reason people who eat at Golden Corral or Old Country Buffet eventually find their way back to the kitchen for another meal – the satisfaction doesn't last. It can't. I heard somewhere recently that when a baby is born, its stomach is the size of a cherry. My how things change! Try satisfying your hunger with a thimble full of rice, and see if it works. When we try to satisfy our hunger with food that spoils, we'll end up even emptier inside, and next time we'll need even more. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, and does give you in his gospel.

This whole business about food that spoils doesn't sound good. It didn't sound good to those people following Jesus. So they tried to change the subject, and asked the million dollar religious question: **"What should we do to carry out the works of God?"** If it's all about me, what do I have to do to get at some of that food that doesn't spoil, the stuff that lasts for eternity? What do I have to do so that I *stop* working for food that spoils and *start* working for food that lasts? It's the most natural question to ask because it's the natural instinct in us since birth: to make a peddler out of God. "Of course I've got to do something to get that eternal blessing! I do my part, and God does his, right?" But they missed the most important part of what Jesus said. **"Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."** This isn't about you or what you do, it's about what God does. Jesus answered their natural question with a supernatural answer: the gospel! **"This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent."** Earlier Jesus said the Father placed the seal of approval on him. The Father did that lots of times: from all eternity, anointing Jesus as his only-begotten Son; in the waters of the Jordan when Jesus was baptized. And the Father would do it again on the Mount of Transfiguration. But the Father also placed the seal of approval on his Son again on Easter morning when he raised Jesus. The resurrection says: "You are my Son, and you have succeeded in taking away the sin of the world." This is what God requires to receive the Bread of Life for eternal life: Believe it. Believe Jesus is the Son he sent and that Jesus has taken your sins away. That is the work God requires: faith in the Bread of Life.

But, you know, there is a second way that it's true to say faith in the "work of God." It's the faith he works in our hearts. God, do your work. Give us faith, strengthen our faith in the one you sent. Work faith in hearts through the good news of the gospel.

Jesus is the ultimate and only source of spiritual life, total sustenance, total satisfaction. So please listen when he says, "I am the Bread of Life," *I am your life*. For all our running around working for food that spoils, Jesus the Son of God said, **"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his**

**head.”** What a remarkable promise Jesus makes – *eternal satisfaction, never hungry, never thirsty*. How can he say that? The one who didn’t own a stitch of land, the man who didn’t live in the lap of luxury, the rabbi who didn’t have a pile of money lying around that he could start shelling out, speaks to you as the One who is able to give you everything.

Yes, he’ll see to it that you have clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, and everything you own. But let even those temporary blessings point to his ultimate, eternal gift. The next time you lift a sandwich to your mouth, thank God for the bread that holds it together. But remember just how little that bread is worth compared to the Bread of Life. And thank God he’s given you the Bread of Life especially.

Jesus gave up all things to give you everything. Elsewhere in John’s gospel, Jesus said, **“My food is to do the will of him who sent me.”** What was the will of God who sent him? That this Jesus would live in perfect trust of God’s providence, because he knew you wouldn’t; that this Jesus would resist the urge to put his temporary needs ahead of your eternal need; that this Jesus would always and only strive toward his Father’s will and keep himself laser-focused on eternity, because he knew you couldn’t.

**“My food is to do the will of him who sent me.”** What was the will of God who sent Jesus? That this Jesus would go to a cross and give up all, so that he could give you everything. **“My food is to do the will of him who sent me.”** What was this food that satisfied and sustained Jesus? Saving you. Jesus’ sustenance was his suffering, death, and resurrection. It’s been well said that God hasn’t given all sorts of different gifts to the world – as if love is one and hope is another and faith still another. God has given one gift to the world – Christ his Son, the Bread of Life – and in that gift are contained all other gifts.

In a time and culture that strives to find satisfaction in food that spoils, and looks for fulfillment in temporal things, remember the promise here: Jesus gives you more. You could work and toil and scrimp and scrape for food that perishes. You could spend your life in service to the idol called “security,” as if you could ever reach it for certain. But don’t go that way; you’ll only end up with holes in your purse or wallet. It will never satisfy; it will never be enough. This is food that spoils. And besides, such thinking turns God into a Scrooge. How stingy to give someone a mansion and a million and a Maserati and then leave him for eternity. How stingy!

Yes, he rejoices to provide for your daily needs, but wants you to see in all his gifts, the one gift that eternally matters – Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. God wants you to see his greatest blessing, Christ himself, and how he wants to give you that gift over and over and over again – in his promises fulfilled in the gospel, in the water of your baptism where he connected you to Jesus, in the bread and wine of his Supper, where Jesus feeds you with his body and blood for your forgiveness. Through those simple-looking means, Christ is giving himself to you; making you a full partaker of the total sacrifice of himself on the cross. The God of all that is, has made himself completely yours in Christ.

**“I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus is the Bread of Life...eat up. Amen.**