

Eating Bread That Satisfies Forever

John 6:22-35

Trinity Lutheran Church

August 2, 2015 – Tenth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. When you think of bread, what image comes to mind? The *Small Catechism* reminds us that bread embodies and incorporates everything necessary for life. In fact, if you think about it, all the vitality and energy of life is baked into bread – the energy of the sun and the rain, the nutrients of soil and seed, the plow of the farmer, the stone of the miller, the hand of the baker, and the heat and fire of the oven. Bread is the “staff of life” – the backbone of our diet. It’s common, ordinary, everyday food – food which Jesus taught His disciples to pray for daily. In short, according to God’s Word, “daily bread” is everything we need “to support this body and life.” Without daily bread we would all starve – and apart from it there can be no life.

A couple of weeks back our Scripture readings reported an incident where thousands upon thousands ate their fill of miracle bread – while neither perceiving the sign, nor believing in the One who fed them – *and* while missing entirely the deeper purpose and meaning of that event. As they ate they might have been thinking of the “Bread of Affliction” from the Passover – of yeastless, hard bread, baked in haste, and eaten on the run. But how different the bread from Jesus was – eaten while reclining in soft comfort on a hillside of green grass. Or, they might have recalled the bread their fathers ate in the wilderness – the bread of heaven which God caused to rain down upon them as thin flakes every morning for forty years – white as coriander, and sweet as honey. But they should have seen beyond those barley loaves that didn’t run out. They should have looked a little further to Jesus – to this One who had come to feed them Bread which lasts forever. But, as is often the case, they were blind and unable to see it.

Sadly, their attention was fixed *not* on the heavenly Baker of bread, but instead, on their own bellies – which, when filled, caused them to chase after Jesus to Capernaum – believing perhaps that He might be able to work the same kind of “magic” He’d worked with the loaves and the fishes on the economy, the unemployment situation, and the hunger problems of Israel. But they had entirely missed the point. They had failed to look beyond the bread to its Giver – to the Passover, the green grass, the twelve baskets, and the bread in the wilderness. You see, Jesus wants your heart and mind to move beyond daily bread so that you can see the Bread of Life hidden behind it. Jesus wants to bring you from barley bread to living Bread – but to do that He

has to break down three seemingly impenetrable barriers standing in the way.

The first of those barriers is the belly. Jesus teaches that we are not to labor for food which perishes, but that endures unto eternal life – the kind of food which the Son of Man alone can give. Isaiah once asked us consider why we spend our money on what isn’t bread, and why we labor for things that don’t last. So, what God wants us to realize here is that there are two kinds of food in this world – perishable and eternal. Perishable food is concerned with refrigerators, freezers, preservatives, and expiration dates. Even the manna in the wilderness had an expiration date. And perishable food feeds only that life which one day will perish. When the Corinthians cried out that food was for the stomach and that the stomach was for food, Paul reminded them that God would destroy them both! That certainly puts things in perspective – for the foods we eat are *not* going to last forever, and neither will the bodies that eat them. You might be worried about the negative effects of popcorn popped in tropical oil, tacos, burritos, enchiladas, Big Macs – or whatever else might find its way onto the latest dietary hit list – but in the end you’re still going to die. Our American obsession with calories, cholesterol, fat, fitness, and fiber may help us live a healthier, wiser life, but in the end the wages of sin is still death – and no earthly diet is ever going to alter that payday.

Just as there are two kinds of food, there are also two kinds of life – natural life, born of the flesh and received from our parents through conception and birth. And spiritual life, born from above in Baptism by water and the Spirit. In addition to the food you eat as the result of your own labor, so you must also partake of that food which comes from God’s work. Life born of flesh needs the perishable bread of the earth – earned by the sweat of the brow and the strains and stresses of everyday life – perishable as this week’s paycheck and last week’s loaf of bread. Life born in Baptism is fed with another kind of food – an eternal, heavenly food which Jesus alone can give as the One who brings heaven to earth, unites God and man in Himself, and bears the Father’s seal of approval – the testimony that He alone is the beloved Servant-Son sent to feed us sinners food that endures to eternal life – food we do not, nor cannot, work for.

And that’s the second barrier through which Jesus must break. In the Garden God told Adam that because

of sin all the food eaten by man would be eaten by the sweat of his brow. And later St. Paul wrote that if any person refused to work, then neither should he eat. In this text, when the people asked Jesus what they needed in order to do the works of God, our Lord could have replied by reciting the Ten Commandments – for those are certainly the works of God – but instead, Jesus stood the question on its head, saying that it's not our work which counts, but only God's. It's not the work you do for God that feeds you forever with imperishable food, but rather the work God does for you. And this "work of God" is that you believe in the One He sent to save us all. The "work" that feeds you with imperishable, eternal food is really no work to you at all. It's the work of God on and in you that enables you to believe and trust in Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Faith, after all, is nothing more than the work of God in you. Faith is what's left when there's nothing left to do. To believe is simply to receive from God in the very same way the body draws upon food. It soaks up the vitality and energy of God's life, even as your body soaks up the vitality and energy of the food it eats. You can no more work for the food that will feed you forever than all those thousands labored for the barley loaves and fishes they ate on that hillside during the feeding of the 5,000! And that brings me to the third barrier God has to break down in each of us: namely, unbelief – that in-born, hard-hearted resistance which keeps us from receiving what God deigns to give us freely. Even after Jesus was finished feeding the people, they continued to ask Him what further sign He was going to show them so that they might believe. You see, the problem with a faith based only on the execution of miracles is that it always demands newer and bigger miracles to feed on – and such a faith will almost always shrivel and starve when the miracles quit coming.

Feeding thousands with five barley loaves and a few fish wasn't a big enough miracle for those whose fathers had eaten manna in the wilderness for 40 years. They'd been there and done that with Moses. They wanted something new – something better – something bigger! But, if you trust Jesus only in so far as He's able to supply you with this morning's miracle, quiet an afternoon's grumbling belly, or solve the evening's problem, how are you ever going to trust Him with the big, eternal, important things – like the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, and the resurrection of the body on that final, Great Day when our Savior will come again to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end?

That's why Jesus is always directing you to see *beyond* the manna and the barley bread to a yet greater Bread – to Christ Jesus, Himself – as He draws you out of and beyond your immediate needs and hunger to the one great need and hunger He alone can fill. You might think you can sustain yourself on the fluffy Wonder Bread of pop-religion. You might be tempted to nibble on the delicate croissants and elegant pastries of material possessions. You might even think you can be satisfied by chewing on and digesting the hard, 10-grain bread of work, achievement, and success. But friends, in the end there's still only one Bread that can satisfy the eternal hunger which always makes you cry out for more.

"I AM the bread of life," says Jesus. "He who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." Of all the ways Jesus could have described Himself, this one is the most basic to life. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Bread with a capital "B" – the One who alone gives life with a capital "L" – who alone is the vitality and energy of the life of God – the only One who can feed the life of God into us. He is the Manna of the End Times come down from Heaven to feed His Church as She wanders in the wilderness between Baptism and the Promised Land of the Resurrection of all flesh on the Last Day.

Dear friends, all this is much more than just a symbol, or some clever figure of speech. The truth is that when you come to Jesus, His promise is, that as you draw upon Him and receive the energy and vitality of this living Bread from heaven, you'll never be hungry ever again. When your trust is stayed in Jesus, He will grant you to drink of Living Water so that you'll thirst no longer. When you believe in Him as Your Savior, God will place you on the gift-receiving-end of this One who said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled." *Here*, dear friends, *here* is Bread the way the world cannot bake it – Bread that satisfies eternally – Bread filled with the abundance of the vitality and energy of God – Bread that not only supplies health and vigor for time spent in this life, but which also bestows on you the forgiveness of sins – and even more importantly, eternal bliss in that life which is yet to come. Every other food you eat will ultimately be transformed into the eater. But *this* Bread – which is nothing other than the Gospel of our dear Lord Jesus – will transform the one who eats it, and cause them to rise up to eternal life. May it always be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.