

J.j.

“Be Gentle When You Touch Bread”

Homily for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost, B—5. Aug., A.D. 2018 ☩

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

John 6:24-35 24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 26 Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” 28 Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” 30 So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 32 Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” 34 They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” 35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (NRSV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. (Rm.1:7)

I don’t know about you, but when I think of bread I think of a crusty loaf of sourdough, golden brown, substantial, made of whole grain, and satisfying. I think of the endless wheat fields of Kansas—we served two churches there in the Flint Hills—and when I get to this miracle story I am always reminded of this poem titled, “Be Gentle When You Touch Bread”—here are a few lines:

Be gentle
When you touch bread.
... So often bread is taken for granted.
... Winds and rain have caressed it,
Christ often blessed it.
Be gentle
When you touch bread.

(Author unknown. Taken from Wm. Backus & Paul Malte, *Crossroad*. Medford, Or: Morse Press, 1963)

“So often bread is taken for granted.” There does seem to be something about us that takes the gifts of God and misuses them.

Like the 5000, we see bread multiplied, but we miss the point.

We, too, are hungry, but for the wrong things.

As this miracle story unfolds we see our Lord begin to recognize what the people wanted--they wanted to seize him and make him king--a king of bread and fish--so they wouldn’t have to go to work anymore.....but he left them! That’s a rather frightening part of this story. - - - Would Jesus walk out on us?

Point 1. The Jews Were Hungry for a King of Bread & Fish—We Too.

We are hungry for security.

[The Jews] said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” (John 6:52)

The 5000 had eaten their fill--this was now the next day—back home on the other side of the lake and they were hungry again, but this was a puzzle: When Jesus said, “27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. I am the living bread ... and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh,” they were confused.

“Give us his flesh as bread to eat?” How can he do that? What does that mean?

We need to eat--and **we need** a certain amount of goods & services just to live. It is not sinful in itself to have things we need. But whenever there's a downturn in the economy, we worry if we'll have enough --we worry about the economy. Then, when "good times" come we worry that the bad times could come back-- we fear inflation—we hunger for **security**—we want to **survive**.

Someone estimated that at one time there were 50,000 "survivalists" in the U.S. A cabin way back in the woods--a "back-to-nature" culture--secret hideaways with canned food & bottled water--guns and ammunition It was -- and is -- their way of having security.

Others are more traditional—change the government, throw out the president, recall the governor, get new ones that can save our bread & fish. On an individual level, I hear people turn to gambling--lotteries multiply--Indian gaming spreads--sweepstakes for this or that—some people want to find security that way.

Thomas Ludwig & David Myers are Christian psychologists. Writing in a periodical called Currents in Theology and Mission (1982) they discuss some psychological and theological perspectives on the economy. They helped **me** to see the futility of finding satisfaction, let alone true security, in things—two facts:

1. People at all income levels (except the very rich) think just 10 to 20 % more income would bring them happiness!
2. Real, disposable income--corrected for inflation--right now is more than 50% higher today than in the late 50's..... Yet we always complain.

"Poor talk" is the phrase these Lutheran psychologists use to describe this. They point to the "adaptation-level phenomenon"--we experience an improvement in our standard of living--we adapt—then we want more. Today's luxuries become tomorrow's necessities—that's not really news, is it? The great philosopher, Plato, 250 years B.C., said, "Poverty consists not in the decrease of one's possessions, but in the increase of one's greed." I repeat, "Poverty consists not in the decrease of one's possessions, but in the increase of one's greed."

Point 2. We Have False Security

In our greed we grasp at possessions to provide a sense of security, but our lack of **trust** is showing: we **doubt** God's ability to take care of us. In our pride we tell ourselves that what we have is ours because we've earned it. We fail to give God the glory—both greed and pride are the worship of idols, false gods—they are the worship of things and self, rather than the true God. Our hunger is unmasked! We want Jesus for our King of bread & fish to assure us of a constant supply of goods so we can feel secure, and we want him to congratulate us for having the good sense to follow him and make him king. And what does he offers us? his flesh.

Are we confused like the 5000? Toward the end of the chapter we read that "**many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him!**" Jesus was even moved to ask the twelve, "**Will you also go away?**" Notice that there are two episodes of "leaving" in this chapter--Jesus left the crowds when they pressed upon him to make him king; and now the crowds left

Jesus when he said “hard sayings” like: **“I came down from heaven...”** and **“eat my flesh and drink my blood....”**

Point 3. Could There Be Eternal Consequences to our Confusion?

These are hard sayings yet today, but passing up the Bread of Life has eternal consequences because then it is **God who passes us up.**

Jesus was sent by the Father to be consumed, that is, to be believed, to be trusted with our lives.

To pass up this Bread is to pass up the Father's gift—when we rely **only** on our own possessions for survival, for security, eternal death is our end.

So we've seen, 1. We are Hungry for a King of Bread, hungry for security, but 2. Really We Have False Security, which 3. Can Lead to Eternal Death.

It's quite clear that:

Point 4. We Need The Bread of Life

Our Lord Jesus fed the 5000 there on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee with a little boy's lunch of five rolls and two sardines.

It was necessary--they had come far to hear him.

But the heavenly sign of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes is meant to point to him as the Host of the Messianic banquet.

Jesus said, **“...the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”**

When Jesus gives his "flesh" for the life of the world, it is the Gift of the cross.

In His flesh as the God-Man dying upon the cross, and in his blood, shed to the last drop, is our source of life, because he took our sins to the cross.

As Jesus was raised from death by his loving Father, so are we raised up into life forever by the same Loving Father, because we trust his Son, Jesus.

Last Point, The Passover Was Near. Jews would recall salvation by Moses at the Red Sea—their ancestors saved from starving in the desert by manna-bread.

Jesus said, **it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.**

He is saying, “I am better than manna! Even though that **was** miracle-bread, I bring you a greater miracle--eat my flesh--drink my blood and live forever!”

Our Lord Jesus is here today offering himself to us again in Word & Sacrament.

Trust His word of promise this moment—receive Him in Holy Communion now at this altar—believe that He is your Bread of Life, and:

Be gentle
When you touch bread.
Let it not lie
Uncared for--unwanted.
So often bread
Is taken for granted.

There is so much beauty

In bread--
Beauty of sun and soil,
Beauty of patient toil.

Winds and rain have caressed it,
Christ often blessed it.
Be gentle
When you touch bread.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

S.D.g.

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[1396 spoken words] Iowan Old Style11, Georgia 10, Arial 10.