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WE LIVE, BUT NOT BY BREAD ALONE!

Homily for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, 5 August, A.D. 2012 ✠
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

John 6:24-35 24When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were [beside the sea], they themselves got into boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26Jesus 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." 28Then 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." 30So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe in you? What work are you performing? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32Then 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. 33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35Jesus 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."

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The miracle of enough bread to feed 5000 has complicated the life of our Savior. We might wonder why just at this time Jesus risked doing this miracle. As Pr Khalilia pointed out last Sunday, St. John tells us that the passover was near. People were thinking about the ancient Red Sea rescue through God's servant Moses. That fired up hopes for a new Moses, a Messiah.

Remember the first temptation that the Devil put to Jesus when He was hungry? "Don't these round stones here look like new-baked loaves? Turn them into bread." But Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone ..." and He refused. Today, He feeds a multitude with bread, taking a chance to be misunderstood, and sure enough, He was.

So Part I. We Are All Hungry for Earthly Bread

Point A, We're All Looking for our Next Meal

Those 5000 folks had got excited over the healings Jesus had done, and so they followed Him out into the desert.

Then they found Him back in Capernaum -- now they're excited about bread.

Our gospel today starts with ten verses of dialog, where Jesus warns the folks about wanting "Moses bread" -- "manna from heaven."

But the folks said -- well, look at the front cover of your Service Folder: Say it with me all together "*Give us this bread always.*"

They wanted to depend on Jesus for bread!

See the picture of a little boy, a bedouin in the Sinai desert of Egypt, with a sandwich. OK, little boys DO depend on their parents for food -- that's fine.

But those 5000 wanted "Moses bread," free manna! When Jesus helped a hungry crowd far from home in an emergency, it turned into a problem of dependency.

I want to make this clear: dependency itself is not bad -- depending on others is what we do all the time.

Indeed, believing in our Savior and depending on Him for grace and forgiveness is what we know as saving faith.

It is OVER-dependency that is destructive dependency.

We have a problem in our country; too many people are overly dependent.

For example, The Heritage Foundation keeps an annual *Index of Dependence on Government*, and they find in 2011 an alarming 8.1% in the U.S. in dependency.

"More than one in five ... Americans now rely on government assistance ..." other than Social Security and Medicare which, of course, we pay into.

We know that needy folks traditionally have relied on their families, neighbors, and churches to help out in a pinch. And those that help out know that if **they** get into a tight spot, they'll get helped back. That kind of inter-dependence is a natural part of life and builds strength among us.

But dependence on government has the opposite effect. We do need a social safety net, especially in hard times, but a gov't. hand out expects nothing from us in return, and it weakens both the individual and the community. Florida U.S. Representative Allen West wrote, "The social safety net ... can help lift Americans out of poverty toward ... self-reliance. However, that 'net' should never turn into a 'hammock.'" Too many people are overly dependent on government. Yes, we are all looking for our next meal, but St. Paul reminds us, "If anyone is **not** willing to **work**, let him **not** eat." [2 Thess. 3:10, ESV]

Point B. Let's Not Be Blinded by the 'Sign'

Those folks in the desert had seen a miracle. They had plenty to eat with leftovers. It was a sign bigger than any of our hiway signs, but they didn't **get it**.
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, ...
The miracle was to be a signpost pointing to Jesus, the Son of Man, and they missed it. My favorite commentary on John's gospel takes the passage here as a parable very much like the corollary in the story of the woman at the well in chapter 4. There, she was thirsty -- here, folks are hungry, and the point is that **neither water nor food will meet our ultimate needs**.
Hoskyns-Davey write, "... the final need of suffering humanity is satisfied no more by bread than it is by water, ... nevertheless the eating of food, like the quenching of thirst, ... is a parable of the final satisfaction; ..." [*The Fourth Gospel*, p. 282, emphasis added.]

"A parable," they write, a sign is there in our eating and drinking! -- a sign that points to the final banquet in heaven!
When we sit down to our tables for a meal -- (I hope we still sit at table) -- and we pray, "Come Lord Jesus, be our Guest..." or "The eyes of all wait upon You, O Lord ..." -- (I hope we all still pray at meals) -- I hope we don't miss the sign.

I'd like you to hear a poem.

"Be Gentle When You Touch Bread"

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.

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

Meal time is sacred time! Our tables are holy places! Signs of final satisfaction!
But if we are blinded by the sign -- if we do not see in the miracle of bread a sign pointing to the One in Whom we trust for life and death, for final satisfaction

...then we must consider: **Point C. If Blinded, We perish Without the Bread of Life**
John 6, v. 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.

Food perishes. We know that even with refrigerators, earthly food sometimes spoils. I saw this aphorism last week:

“Red meat is not bad for you; **Fuzzy green meat is bad for you.!**”

If we insist on partaking only of the food that perishes, we could miss the gift of eternal life which our Lord offers freely without price.

Let's recap: **Part One, We Are All Hungry for Earthly Bread, and Point A, We're All Looking for our Next Meal; but, Point B, Let's Not Be Blinded by the Miraculous 'Sign' because, Point C, If Blinded, We Perish Without the True Bread of Life.**

Nevertheless, here's the good news

Part II. We Live, Not By Bread Alone, But By the True Bread of Heaven

We live. Simple statement: “We live life.” True statement.
We could say it is a statement of biology.

The word biology comes from the Greek and has in it a word for life, BI-OS [by-os].

We all partake in biological life.

But when our Lord tells us in v. 35, “**I am the bread of life,**” He uses a different Greek word for ‘life,’ ZO-E [zo-ay].

ZO-E [zo-ay] is more than biology. Jesus means, We live, but not by bread alone. In John 1, vv. 1-3, the Evangelist tells us about the Word who was in the beginning, and that Word was God who was to be made flesh -- of that Word he says in v.4 “**In Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.**”

That ‘Word,’ of course, is Jesus, who brought true life, ZO-E, [zo-ay] back to the world. True life that was lost in the Garden of Eden by our first parents is now offered to us by the One who took our biology upon Himself.

Let's recall that He was born in Bethlehem. The Hebrew name is BETH LE-CHEM, which means, “House of Bread.”

So from the House of Bread our Lord Jesus lives His whole life toward the cross.

In our biology -- that is, in our flesh -- He suffered the punishment for our misuse of our lives, our biologies. He died upon that cross for us.

Now it is possible for us to say with Him, as He said to His Father in His ‘high priestly’ prayer, “*And this is eternal life, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*” (John 17:3).

Already we have eternal life -- this IS eternal life for those who trust Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us the great exchange, the sweet swap: His life, ZO-AY, for our life, BY-OS. He has taken into himself our mortal BY-OS and gives us his ZO-AY.

Jesus said, **v.33** “*For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life [ZO-AY] to the world.*” He's talking about Himself -- He is our Bread, our life.

It is this Bread, the True Bread of heaven, that we receive when we believe this holy Word. Jesus said, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*” And it is this True Bread of heaven that we by faith receive at this Table of Holy Communion.

Here **IS** the Bread of Life broken for us. Here **IS** the Blood of Christ shed for us.

We Are All Hungry for Earthly Bread; **we live, but not by bread alone**; we live by the True Bread of Heaven, given **for** us and **to** us.

Stay hungry for the Bread of Heaven!

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