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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13B)

August 2, 2015

Text: John 6:22–35

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ever known a grumbler? Nothing is good enough. The people of Israel had become a nation of grumblers. That's one of the key words in Exodus 16, today's OT reading. The whole congregation grumbled against Moses, Aaron, and God. Why? They were hungry. Slavery, they thought, was better than freedom. At least they had access to the flesh pots and bread to the full. Never mind that the Egyptian task masters made them pay for their food with whips streaking across their backs and with blood staining the sand of abject bondage and servitude.

Grumble, grumble, grumble.

The Lord told Moses to assemble the people. He heard their grumbling. And so the Lord told them that every morning they will be given bread and in the evening, quail.

What kind of bread will you choose? The bread of affliction or the bread of freedom? Egyptian bread earned by the sweat of your brow or the bread of heaven given freely without payment or price? The answer is not as easy as you might think.

Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children wondrously with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. It was a great moment in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Except for our Lord's passion, death and resurrection, no other event in Jesus' life is mentioned in all 4 gospels. That always amazes me. Raising Lazarus from the dead. Only in John's gospel. The parable of the prodigal son. Only in Luke's gospel. Sermon on the Mount? Only in Matthew's gospel. Our Lord's birth? Only discussed in Matthew and Luke. But Jesus feeding 5,000 with bread and fish. All 4 gospel writers include it. That miracle is meant to tell us something most significant. John's gospel tells us why that miracle was so important.

Remember by initial question...do you want the bread of affliction or the bread of freedom? The grumblers of Israel wanted the bread of affliction and slavery. The

bread of freedom sounds great but few actual receive it; we'll see why in a few moments.

Today's gospel reading begins with the crowd who had been fed with the loaves and fish searching high and low for Jesus and His disciples. And they are none too pleased with our Lord's disappearance. They said, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" (vs. 25). Jesus sees through their intentions and makes a rather scathing comment. Vs. 26, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." In other words, you're just looking for your next free meal. You're not really interested in what the miracle was telling you.

And so Jesus admonished them. "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" (vs. 27). One kind is the bread of affliction, the other is the bread of freedom. One bread requires labor, work, sweat and toil. The other is given. No work. No sweat.

That's the distinction Jesus makes. Do not labor – notice that word, labor – for the food that perishes. On the other hand, Jesus gives food – notice that word, gives – that endures to eternal life. One must be worked for and it eventually spoils. The other is given and it endures; it has no expiration date.

It's quite simple to illustrate the two kinds of bread. The bread of affliction or the bread of labor can be found in your refrigerator. Leave it in there too long and it spoils. Loss the electricity and it spoils even faster. What's added to so much of our food? Preservatives. No matter what you do, this food perishes.

And we labor for this perishable food; 40-60 hours a week is required to earn enough money to purchase our food. And then we must still cook it, or pay someone to cook it for you. And we haven't even mentioned the work that took place just so you can purchase it: farmers, ranchers, truckers, the entire energy sector of our society, grocery store owners, checkers, etc. Since the fall into sin, man works for his food with sweat, toil, and adversity.

But there is another kind of food that doesn't perish. It endures, according to Jesus, "to eternal life" (vs. 27). No preservatives or refrigeration. And here's another marvel associated with this food, it's given. Jesus says that He gives it as pure gift (vs. 27). That's what the crowds missed in their joy over having a full stomach the night

before. It was free and undeserved. Gift upon gift with more to spare. Not once did they stop to consider what this miraculous, free meal might mean.

The Small Catechism teaches us that we ask God “to lead us to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” God gives us daily bread by means of the various callings and vocations of human activity. Although it perishes and does not give eternal life, it is good and a blessing of God. The Small Catechism also teaches us what the Bible says about Jesus who redeems us with “His holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death.” That is the food that leads to eternal life. Jesus gives us this food so that we might be His own and live and serve Him in everlasting “righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Do we hunger and thirst for this eternal food as we do breakfast, lunch, and supper?

Well, the crowd still isn’t getting it. Jesus said He’d give them bread leading to eternal life. Listen to their next response, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” (vs. 28). That response exemplifies human sinfulness most powerfully. Jesus offers to give— no strings attached, pure gift – to give this bread of freedom and they respond immediately with “how do I work to get it?” Even though the bread of freedom is offered, the bread of affliction is what they still crave. Remember I said earlier that few people actually receive it?

We are born with a deep craving for the bread of affliction. It goes deeper than just the food on our plate. No matter how much we own, no matter how much power or prestige or wealth we manage to acquire, that deep hunger remains. We long for more than daily bread. We may try to numb the cravings with false breads of alcohol, drugs, sex, various forms of pleasure and entertainment, the acquisition of power, all the things that promise “fulfillment” but ultimately leave us empty. That emptiness is a hunger of the soul, a spiritual hunger that calls for spiritual bread.

Listen to Jesus in vs. 29, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” The bread of freedom is simple trust and faith in Jesus; that He gives everything we need for life in this world and eternal life in the new creation.

The crowd isn’t content with Jesus’ claim to being the sent One from God the Father. Vs. 30, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you?” This is a rather strange request. Just the night before Jesus fed 5,000 plus people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Maybe they didn’t think that was big enough. After all, they remind Jesus, Moses

fed the children of Israel with manna from heaven not once but every day for 40 years! You've got to do better than that Jesus.

The true bread of God is not found in manna in the wilderness nor is it found in the bread and fish given to the crowd. The bread of freedom is found in Jesus. Vs. 35, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

The Christian's life, beginning in baptism and culminating in his/her final entrance into the portals of heaven, is nourished with Jesus. He is the bread of heaven that the manna signified. He is the eternal bread of life that the loaves and fish pointed to. He alone can fulfill the deepest longings of our soul. Everything else leaves you unfulfilled with an ever increasing desire accompanied with an ever diminishing pleasure (C.S. Lewis).

All the longings of your soul can be fulfilled only in Jesus. That's what the manna of Exodus 16 and the feeding of the 5,000 recorded in the gospels tells us. "This is the work of God, that you believe you believe in him whom God has sent." Jesus is the "bread of life, whoever comes to Him shall not hunger and shall never thirst." Believe and enjoy. The bread of freedom, is laid before you. There's plenty for all!

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.