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

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14B)

August 9, 2015

Text: John 6:35–51

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

The Bible, from the very beginning, describes humanity as being a hungry, thirsty, creature. You may eat of any of the trees in the garden, says the Lord, and every plant and every tree is yours for food. But that hunger and thirst runs deeper than the pains you feel from an empty stomach. The human heart and soul hungers and thirsts for the living God, for His truth, for His life. So much of human activity and creativity grows out of this deep-seated hunger for God. The Lord Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (vs. 35).

Jesus has performed a number of wondrous miracles by this time in His earthly ministry. Most notably, the feeding of the 5,000 men plus women and children with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. You may recall that I told you a couple of weeks ago that this is the only miracle that all 4 gospel writers mention. You might think of it as a miracle of miracles. With that miracle ringing in the back of our minds, we can hear better when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” The Lord gave that large crowd a powerful object lesson as to who He is. No one left that day hungry or thirsty. It was a divine, miraculous feast; a pure gift of love from God's holy Son.

But now, it's as if Jesus were saying you think that bread was good. The strength of that meal of bread and fish lasted a few hours. You were hungry again the next day, that's why you came looking for me, Jesus told the crowd. The bread Elijah received from the angel, described in today's OT reading, gave him strength for 40 days! But Jesus offers something that is on a wholly different scale altogether. The bread I give, says Jesus, will never leave you hungry and it gives eternal life.

I am the bread of life; I am the bread of salvation, the bread of reconciliation with God the Father, the bread of resurrection on the last day. I am the bread of life. I want these promises ringing in your ears for years to come. When you consume this bread, you will never be cast aside or abandoned. Jesus said in vs. 37, “All that the Father gives

me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” The world may come to an end. Trusted companions may disappoint. But Jesus, the bread of life, will never set you aside or grow weary of your company. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (vs. 38–39). This bread is the food of immortality.

Can you imagine the media storm that would be created if some scientist discovered a substance that would give you undying life? I’m not talking about some snake oil salesman but the real deal. The media coverage would be unending. The crowds would be impossible to manage. It would go viral on social media. But alas, I walked into this church building quite easily today. Crowd control wasn’t necessary. Nobody cornered me demanding to get some of this miraculous, life-giving substance.

But the truth of the matter is, this life-giving substance is here for all to receive freely. No insurance is required. No copays or deductibles must be met. No doctor needs to examine you. Preexisting conditions won’t prevent this bread from working. You cannot overdose and there are no negative side-effects. My pastoral calling is to give you this divine, bread of life. In the words of our liturgy, in the hymns that are sung, in the inspired scriptures that are read, in the consecrated bread that will be placed in your mouth, Jesus is giving you the bread of life. He gives you Himself.

I suppose people can respond to Jesus’ claims in one of three ways. One is faith and trust as evidenced by you being here today. And thanks be to God that you’re here. We join in with the psalmist from so long ago, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.” For us, today is a true feast on the bread of life. Next Sunday will be another feast. And the Sunday after that, and after that, and after that until the eternity of eternities. And we mustn’t forget about our Bibles, and catechisms, and hymnals at home which give us Jesus, the bread of life. The more of Jesus you consume, the more you desire to know Him and love Him.

Another possible response to Jesus’ teaching is neglect. To use the imagery of eating – since we’re talking about bread – this is the response of malnourished Christians. They’re just underfed. Not because the bread of life isn’t being offered. It’s just because they neglect to eat. I read one pastor who winsomely said he sometimes feels like the grandma who keeps sticking food in front of you and saying, “Eat, eat, you’re all skin and bones.” It saddens me to see Christians go without the nourishment they need, the food that is freely given so frequently.

There should be no rationing of the bread of life, no measured portions. Eat as much as you can as often as you can. It seems to me that many malnourished Christians think of Jesus as the “bread of last resort.” He’ll get us through in a pinch but otherwise, not so much. Bite sized portions only. Not so dear saints. Let us feast on the bread of life. Remember what the Bible said about the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. They all ate to fill, as much as they wanted. And when it was all over, the disciples collected 12 baskets full of the fragments. In other words, there was more left over than when they began. You cannot, cannot – it’s simply impossible – to exhaust the bread of life.

The third response to Jesus’ teaching is exemplified in the reaction to the Jews. Look at vs. 41, “So the Jews grumbled – remember that word from last week!! – about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’” Not wait just a minute Jesus. You! came down from heaven? “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” (vs. 42). Unbelief, pure and simple unbelief.

Since Adam and Eve’s original sin, every man, woman, and child has struggled with unbelief. Again, since we’re talking about bread and eating, you might describe unbelief as an eating disorder. That disorder began when Adam and Eve chose to eat the wrong food. Instead of eating from the tree of life they ate from tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God warned them that the day they eat of that forbidden food, they would surely die. And we have been eating of that forbidden food ever since. So much so, in fact, that our (I’m speaking of unredeemed humanity as a whole) hunger for the bread of life has virtually gone extinct. Oh, the hunger for transcendence and meaning remains. God created us with it. But we keep trying to satisfy it with the junk food of sin and disobedience. We have forgotten what good food tasks like. C.S. Lewis, in one of his writings, once said that we are too easily satisfied. We hunger for love but settle for lust. We hunger for glory and settle for pride and arrogance. We hunger for meaning and purpose and settle for accumulation of wealth and worldly goods.

Jesus offered the Jews the bread of life and they grumbled because of their unbelief. He’s too ordinary. We know His family. He’s just a regular guy. Maybe He performed a miracle or two but to come down from heaven? That’s too much. They were too used to eating the junk food of sin and unbelief.

Dear saints of God, I urge you not to settle for the cheap junk foods of unbelief or neglect. Instead, develop and satisfy your palate for the bread of life. Even though Jesus comes to us as a very ordinary 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish man born to humble parents and who died a grueling death by crucifixion, He is the bread of life raised from the dead on the third day so that our deepest hungers may be satisfied with the richness of heaven. Listen to vs. 51 and may it sharpen your hunger, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Consuming this bread will give not spare you from life’s troubles nor from the various anxieties that all Christians face from time to time. But it will satisfy you to the depths of your soul with a wholeness that cannot be found anywhere else. Consuming this bread, you can live confidently and joyfully in the sure and certain hope of eternal life now and in the resurrection on the Last Day. Jesus, the living bread from heaven, will keep you safe and secure with Him unto eternal life. May your feasting on the bread of life be continuous and filled with great joy and satisfaction.

✠ 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.