

Pentecost 10 / August 1, 2021

John 6:35

***“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger,
and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”***

Jesus is the bread that gives eternal life

The Psalmist sang, *“The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”* Every living creature needs food to live. In scripture God is described as the creator and sustainer of life in every living thing. God expresses His love for the world He made, by causing grass to grow for cattle and plants for man to cultivate to bring forth food from the earth; *“wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”* He does this not just for the people who worship Him. God does all this for everyone, the righteous and the unrighteous, out of the love of His heart. Jesus fed five thousand from five loaves of bread and two fish, as an expression of God’s love and to show that He is God in human flesh.

In last week’s gospel Jesus fed a multitude, but He did not come to nourish our bodies; He does that through the creation. He came to nourish our spirits with Himself, as our Saviour from sin and death. He nourishes our spirits through the gospel of forgiveness, which He earned by the blood of His cross. The food we eat will only get us through one day at a time. The food that we eat and our physical hunger reminds us of our spiritual hunger and thirst for the nourishment only Jesus can give and which He calls us to receive saying, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* Jesus is the bread which nourishes our whole soul, spirit and body to eternal life.

Food is essential to life and so it’s only natural that we value highly the things of the earth that sustain and enhance our lives in the world. It’s a blessing to be filled with the food of the earth. It’s the greatest blessing to be filled with the heavenly food Jesus gives. Jesus fed the crowd, because it was late in the day and they needed to eat; just as God fed Israel in the wilderness, because they needed to eat. The following day some of that crowd came looking for Him on the other side of the lake. There was nothing wrong with that, we should seek the Lord every day. In chapter fifty-five the prophet Isaiah says, *“Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.”* Jesus was near and so they went looking for Him on the other side of the lake.

Jesus identified Himself as God through the miracle of the bread and the fish, but these people were not seeking Jesus because they realized He was God. They had eaten their fill of the bread the previous day. They were hungry again and wanted more. There was nothing wrong with that either, in and of itself. We pray God to give us each day our daily bread. The problem was that the bread Jesus offered was for the soul, but they only wanted bread for their stomachs. In Jesus they saw the power to satisfy their physical needs and make them prosperous. Jesus told them not labour for the food that perishes with use, *“but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”* Jesus gives bread. He gives Himself for the life of the world!

Jesus’ words give us pause to ask ourselves why we seek Him and what we want from Him; bread from heaven, or the bread of the earth? The bread of the earth is sufficient for time, but when our time is over, its purpose and effect is done. It lacks the power to preserve our lives forever. We need bread to live, but we shouldn’t live for bread. Its purpose is to sustain our lives, but it was not meant to be our life. We must eat to live, but living to eat is another matter. God is our reason to live. He gives us life in body and preserves our lives through the bread of the earth. But we live not by the bread of the earth. We live by the words that come from mouth of God. Jesus is the word of God in human flesh. He came that we would have full and meaningful lives in time and the fulness of life in eternity. We seek not only or

mostly, the food that preserves physical well-being. Above all else, we seek the food Jesus gives. The food He gives nourishes body and soul to eternal life.

Jesus uses our physical needs to identify our spiritual needs. Two chapters before our gospel, He asked a Samaritan woman to draw water for Him, because He was thirsty. She replied with some sarcasm, asking why a Jewish man would make such a request of a Samaritan woman? He immediately turned the tables and moved from the physical to the spiritual, saying, *“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.”* The water and bread Jesus gives satisfies our spiritual hunger for relationship with God and relieves our thirst for His righteousness, in forgiveness. Our physical need for nourishment reminds us of our spiritual need for the nourishment only Jesus gives. Jesus meets our spiritual needs by offering Himself as the bread from heaven, which a person may eat and live with God in eternity.

Jesus provides the bread that gives eternal life, by offering Himself on the cross for the life of the world. The bread He gives is Himself, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. The bread He gives is the forgiveness of sins, received through faith by the hearing of the word, by the washing of baptism and the gift of His holy body and precious blood in communion. The bread that He gives is the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to sustain our faith and to empower us walk in newness of life. The bread He gives is the promise that He will make us new, body and spirit in His resurrection to eternal life. The bread Jesus gives is His life for the world. The bread Jesus gives is Himself as our Saviour and Lord in time and for eternity.

Our need for earthly bread reminds us of our greater need for the nourishment of God’s righteousness in Christ Jesus. He is the bread that nourishes our souls to eternal life. There is nothing wrong with the things of the earth that enhance our physical lives. There is nothing wrong with worldly wealth, but it is most important to be wealthy in the things of God that endure to eternal life. The rich and the poor both come to the same end. Quality of life is not determined by the things we possess, or by the things we lack. Quality of life is determined by the things of the spirit, especially the things of the Spirit of God. The bread Jesus gives fills our lives with the best things: the love of God, the communion of the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of believers, the forgiveness of sin and the promise of resurrection to eternal life.

Jesus said to those who came looking only the bread of the earth, *“Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you.”* In the ancient world people had to work hard to receive benefits from the gods they worshipped. It’s our nature to believe we have to do something to receive good things from God. But God gives good things as a gift regardless of the good we do. He gives good things despite the sins we commit. What did the multitude do to motivate, or deserve Jesus to feed them in the wilderness? They did nothing. Jesus did everything and He did it all out of the kindness of His heart. Jesus gives everything out of the kindness of His heart.

He gives himself as the bread of life, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. He gives the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and the promise rising in Him to a new and eternal life. He even gives us the faith by which we receive Him, believe and confess Him as our Saviour and Lord. Jesus said, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him who He has sent.”* He calls us to Himself that He might work in us. He says, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* May the Lord who has begun this good work within us, carry on to completion in our share of Christ’s resurrection. In His Name. Amen