

## Pentecost 11 / August 4, 2024

### John 6:35

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

God fed Israel in the wilderness with bread from heaven, which they called “Manna”. The Lord, through Moses, instructed them to take enough for each day and not to seek it on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day to rest. The manna would not come on the Sabbath. The previous day’s supply would be sufficient for both days. Even as Jesus provided food for a multitude from five loaves and two fish, so the Lord would make the food from Friday sufficient to meet the needs of Saturday. Moses warned the people against storing manna for future use. The manna they hoarded would rot and make a terrible smell. Their trust was not in their store of manna. Their trust was in the Lord who gave them bread from heaven each day to meet the needs of their whole spirit; body and soul. Moses said, “Human beings do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” We do not live because of the bread of the earth, but by the kindness of the Lord, who empowers the earth to produce the nourishment by which our lives are sustained in the world.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness to use His divine power to transform stone into bread. Jesus at various times used His divine power for such a purpose. He transformed water into wine. He made a handful of bread and a few fish into food sufficient to feed thousands, with baskets of leftovers. However, He would not use His power to His own benefit. He replied in the words of Moses saying, “Human beings do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” God is the source of life of all things living. In providing bread and fish to feed a multitude in the wilderness, Jesus showed Himself to be the Word of God in human flesh.

He expressed that point with crystal clarity in our gospel, when a remnant of the multitude came for more bread. He told them to seek a more powerful, enduring bread from Him that would preserve life eternally. Even the bread He provided the previous day, only had power to sustain life for the day, like the ancient manna in the wilderness. He told them and tells us that we should seek most diligently the bread that nourishes to eternal life. He is the bread of life. He enlivens our whole spirit, soul and body in relationship with the Father in the forgiveness of sins. More than we need food and drink for daily living, we need Jesus for daily bread. He gives life in time and for eternity!

In the days prior to our gospel, large crowds had followed Jesus. John says they followed, “because they saw the signs He was doing on the sick.” People came to Jesus for help in their physical needs and He never failed to provide. Jesus provided without being asked. They were in a lonely place and there was no food available. He determined to give them food to eat and a sign of the spiritual food He brings in His person and offers for all to receive. He had the crowd, numbering five thousand men, perhaps more with women and children, to be seated and for the disciples to distribute among them the five loaves and two fish in their provisions. What was so little among so many? The result was astounding: Enough to feed the crowd with twelve baskets left over. Even as God miraculously fed ancient Israel with bread in the wilderness, so Jesus miraculously fed their ancestors with bread in a lonely place.

When everyone had finished eating the disciples began to collect the leftovers. Twelve baskets were filled with leftovers from five loaves and two fish. The crowd gradually realized something astounding had happened. Thinking He was the great prophet God had promised Israel through Moses, they tried to seize Him and make Him king. The crowd were correct in one sense. Jesus is the great prophet the Lord promised Israel through Moses. He is the king of Israel and heir to the promise of an eternal kingdom. However, they were mistaken in their understanding of the nature of His kingdom. Jesus is not an earthly king. He rules not by law as in an earthly kingdom. The place of His reign is the human heart, where He rules in the grace of forgiveness. John said in the prologue of the gospel, “The law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Jesus would show Himself a different prophet and king. He provides for our needs in time to show His power provide for our greatest needs in eternity; forgiveness, peace with God and resurrection to newness of life.

Jesus evaded their grasp. His time not yet come. Moreover, He wasn't the kind of king they wanted or expected. He sent His disciples to the other side of the sea while He went by Himself to pray. During the night He came to them walking on the water. People didn't understand Jesus. They knew He had God's power to heal. They didn't grasp that He is God's power to forgive. Even His disciples didn't fully understand who He is, the purpose of His coming and the nature of His rule. Jesus came to them on the water, not because there were no other options. He came to them on the sea, so they would see He is their God and Saviour.

God worked miracles through the prophets. Through Moses He parted the waters and made a path of safety through the Red Sea. Jesus worked miracles by His divine power. Jesus showed His divine nature as the Son of God eternally begotten, by forgiving sins. Who but God can forgive sins! He showed His divine power by walking on the sea. Who but God can walk on the waves? Jesus has power to help in time and save eternally those who receive Him as God and believe in Him as their Saviour.

Jesus and the disciples disembarked at Capernaum, which served as homebase during Jesus' ministry. The following day some from the crowd realized Jesus was no longer with them. They saw the disciples leave in the only boat. They knew Jesus hadn't left with them. They searched and when they couldn't find Him, they perceived He must somehow have crossed the lake, though they didn't know how. There was only one boat, which His disciples had taken and He wasn't in it. The first question they asked when they found Him in Capernaum was "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Interestingly, Jesus didn't answer their question. Instead, He went right to the heart of the matter, their true reason for seeking Him, the reason so many followed Him; the bread of the earth that meets physical needs in time, but which does nothing to give life in eternity. He is the bread that gives eternal life in relationship with the Father through the Spirit.

People came to Jesus for a variety of reasons, chief of which were blessings in time. Some thought He would establish an earthly rule and free Israel from Roman servitude. Some may have thought He would establish a society free from poverty, hunger, disease and political oppression. These people came because they wanted more bread. They sought Him, not because they perceived and understood the sign, that He is the Christ the Son of the living God. They sought Him because they ate the previous day and now were hungry again. The bread Jesus gave, though miraculous, was nonetheless, the bread of the earth that endures for the day and sustains life one day at a time. It was bread from heaven like the manna in the wilderness. It was not the heavenly bread itself. Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He gives life to the world as Creator. He gives eternal life to all who in faith receive Him as their God and Saviour.

Jesus told them to not to labour for the bread that perishes with use and only nourishes for a time. He said they should labour for the bread which endures to eternal life, which He would give them. They asked "what must we do, to be doing the works of God." We always think we have to do something to get something from God. Sometimes we do. The wages of sin is death. We earn that through our sinful actions. The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We receive the life Jesus earned for us by His sinless life and sacrificial death to atone for our sins. Jesus said, the work of God is to believe in the One He sent, Jesus. This is no work; it is simply a matter of believing and receiving. This is no human work! It is the work of God, for faith comes through the hearing of the word by the working of the Holy Spirit, opening our minds to believe and our hearts to receive Christ as our Saviour.

The bread of the earth which sustains life in time is the gift of God, produced by His divine power that enlivens the earth. The bread of the earth shows God's kindness and Himself as the source of life. He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. God fed Israel forty years in the wilderness with bread that fell from heaven. This miraculous manifestation of nourishment was a special working of God's power. Nevertheless, like any other earthly bread, it was for time and had to be replenished daily. It was a sign pointing to our greater spiritual need, to be nourished with God's righteousness that gives eternal life. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. In Christ they are filled. It was a sign pointing towards Jesus. He is the living bread. He gives life to the world through the bread of the earth. He gives eternal life to all who receive Him as living bread and believe in Him as their God and Saviour. God grant this to us all! In Jesus' Name. Amen