

## **Pentecost 11, August 8, 2021**

### **John 6:41**

#### **“I am the bread that came down from heaven.”**

In the prologue to his gospel St. John contrasted Jesus and Moses, saying, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ and Moses are the two most important persons in Israel’s history and in the bible. Moses was the person through whom God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt and by whom He made covenant with them at Mount Sinai. Jesus is the person through whom God rescued humanity from slavery to sin and the condemnation of eternal death. In Jesus, God made a new covenant which extends to people throughout the earth.

The law came through Moses. The law shows us how to live together. The law also shows us why we need laws to live together. The law shows our sins and our need for forgiveness. Jesus paid the debt of human sin and so by His sacrifice, became the Saviour of all people. God gave the law of commandments through Moses, but in Jesus, God expresses the fullness of His grace in forgiveness. The law given through Moses reveals human sinfulness, which causes death. Jesus embodies the grace of God, by which human sin is atoned and forgiven in the hearts of every human soul who receives Him as Saviour, through faith in His name. He said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.”

The comparison between Jesus and Moses was especially important to Israel in the first century. Moses was the law giver and first century Israel lived by the law, thinking that through it they would obtain eternal life. A rich ruler asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said from his youth he had kept all the commandments. Nevertheless, he felt something was missing. Something was missing, the grace of God in forgiveness. The comparison between Jesus and Moses is just as relevant today. All human beings seek life with God, however they conceive of God, through obedience to law; whether it is the commandments, the moral law written on our hearts, or the rules of a particular tradition. Even if we rebel, our rebellion proves we naturally live by rules, by laws and commands, whether we like it or not!

In our gospel Jesus shows that while the law certainly has a place in the world and obviously has a place in the human heart, the law can never bring us to God. We naturally live by law, but the law can never make us live. Just the opposite, the law shows our separation from God. The law shows us we need something only God can give; the mercy of forgiveness. Only God can bring us to Himself, which He does through His eternally begotten Son, Jesus the Messiah. He is greater than Moses for He was before Moses. He is greater than Moses, because He saves us from what the law shows us; sin and eternal death. Through Moses, God gave the law which reveals human sin and shows it to be the cause of death. God reveals the fullness of His loving heart, by giving Jesus to atone for human sin through the blood of His cross. In the law we see our sin. In Jesus we see our Saviour and in Him, receive the spiritual nourishment which a person may eat and live forever; the forgiveness of our sin.

Our gospel began with a miracle. Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand from five loaves of bread and two fish, with twelve baskets of fragments left over. The miracle reminded the people of the miracle God did for their ancestors in the wilderness. He led them by Moses and fed them with bread from heaven, called manna. The bread God gave through Moses was a miracle. It preserved Israel forty years in the wilderness, but it did not preserve them forever. All those who ate the bread God gave in the wilderness eventually died. The bread God gave from heaven miraculously preserved their lives for a time, but not for eternity. That miracle like the miracles that Jesus Himself gave, was a sign pointing to a greater nourishment from heaven, by which a person is sustained in spirit and brought through death to eternal life.

Jesus gave a similar sign when He fed the five thousand. He also gave bread from heaven, but although it came in a miraculous way it had all the properties of earthly bread. It only satisfied hunger for a time. It was not the true bread from heaven that gives eternal life. Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He is God who gives life to the world, through the fruitfulness of the earth and the cycle of the seasons. Most importantly, He is the true bread who gives life to our spirits. He is our Saviour, who gives forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe. He came from heaven to earth, so that through His flesh offered on the cross, human sin would be atoned and people would be drawn to God in faith and have eternal life in Him through the forgiveness of sin. He is the true bread from heaven, who nourishes our souls and gives eternal life to all who believe in Him.

John chapter six is the longest dialogue in the New Testament. It is between Jesus and a remnant of the great crowd, which He had previously fed from five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus had given them a great sign, but what did it mean? On a very basic level of human need, it meant He could give everybody food to eat. It spoke to a basic human need. Food is our most basic physical need. That was important, but was that all the sign meant? Is there anything more important than food, clothing, shelter, riches and the pleasures of the world? In fact there is something more important, our relationship with God and our need for the spiritual nourishment and provision that only He can give.

Jesus challenged their intent in seeking Him and their understanding of the sign. He said, “You are seeking me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate your fill...Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.” God provides for our basic physical needs through the bread of the earth. In Jesus, He provides for our most important spiritual needs with bread from heaven, which a person may eat and live forever. Not forever in this world of sin and death, but forever in His Father’s presence. Jesus is the bread from heaven, through which our souls are nourished with grace in time; and by which our bodies and spirits will be brought to life in eternity. The bread in wilderness, the bread Jesus gave, all point to a greater spiritual nourishment that God provides in Jesus. He is the true bread from heaven, given that a person may eat through faith and have eternal life!

In the Old Testament, God on occasion provided people with earthly bread in miraculous ways. They were bread from heaven, miracles pointing to a greater reality expressed fully in Jesus the living bread from heaven. He sent ravens to bring food to the prophet Elijah during a drought. He sent His angel to bake him cake when he journeyed to Mount Horeb. He provided him with a continuous supply of flour and oil for bread during a famine. The Lord fed Israel forty years in the wilderness with manna, which appeared on the ground each morning. The people in our gospel referred to that event, asking who Jesus thought Himself to be, saying, “Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus replied that the true bread of God is “He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He gives eternal life to all who receive Him!

The nourishment God provided to Elijah and to the Israelites in the wilderness was bread from heaven, in the sense that it came by the special power of God. But although it came from heaven, it was the bread of the earth. It sustained life for daily living. It needed to be replenished each day. It did not give eternal life. Jesus gives eternal life! He said to those who sought Him for earthly bread, “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.” The manna, like the fish and the bread, was a sign pointing to something greater. The signs point to Jesus. He is the true bread of God. He gives life to the world, by offering Himself as the spiritual nourishment that gives eternal life

God at times preserved His people in miraculous ways, in accordance with His eternal purpose of human salvation. God preserves all our lives daily, through the bread of the earth. Whether daily bread comes to us in a miraculous manner, or according to the function of nature, it testifies to God’s kindness and speaks to our greater spiritual need to be fed by the bread of heaven, Jesus our Saviour. What God provides in abundance through the bounty of the earth, He supplies in greater abundance through Christ our Saviour. Even as we need bread to live from day to day, we need the living bread to live forever. Jesus is the living bread from heaven. He gives eternal life to all who receive Him.

God wants us and all people to receive this living bread by believing in Christ as our Saviour! Jesus said, “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day.” He is the bread of eternal life. He calls us to Himself that He might feed us through the gospel of forgiveness and grace. God grant us hearts that hunger for Jesus. God bless us with faith to receive the bread that Jesus gives. In His Name. Amen