

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 13, 2017

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

John 6:24-35 Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (NIV2011)

“Give Us This Bread”

You can't quite put your finger on it. You've known your cousin since you were just kids together. And even though you haven't seen each other in almost a year, you can just tell there is something different. He used to have such a mopey personality, a slouchy demeanor, a defeated air about him. And now, you don't know exactly what it is, but you know there is something different. It could be a new job or a greater sense of satisfaction in his job. It could be a new diet or a healthier exercise regimen. Whatever has caused it, you can't deny the energy he has, the confidence exuding from him, the joy so obvious even in casual conversation. And at this point, it doesn't matter if it is a difficult diet or better exercise. Whatever it is, you want it. You can't help thinking: “I want what he has.”

1. Not the bread we so often chase after

The crowds in John chapter six didn't really know what they were after, but they knew they wanted Jesus. They woke up and he was gone. They went down to the lake. There was no evidence he found alternate transportation to evade them. What they didn't realize, what they couldn't have been expected to understand is the miraculous way he walked across the Sea of Galilee until he met his disciples in a boat and they took him the rest of the way to Capernaum. None of that mattered. They just couldn't let him slip away. Not after what they had seen. Not after what he had given them. So many times good news seems too good to be true. But this

time when they found the dynamic rabbi, he gave them what they were after. And not just them. They were just a small portion of that 5,000+ crowd eating its fill of bread and fish at the hands of Jesus. Now they didn't want to be apart from him for fear they might miss out on something better, more spectacular, farther beyond the abilities of normal religious teachers.

You can't really blame them. We share their curiosity toward Jesus. We know Jesus is special. We know he has power. We know he is capable of doing for us what no one else is qualified to deliver. So our curiosity leads us to follow after Jesus the way we might be game for traveling out to Albuquerque to hear someone speak about real estate investing if he offered to give \$1,000 seed money to anyone in attendance. When Jesus turns out to be more than a simple gimmick, we are eager to figure out what else he can give us. After all, each day is consumed by just barely getting by, just surviving each day, just having a few bucks left in the checking account at the end of the month, just making it to the end of the day before exhaustion sets in. Jesus knows. Jesus cares. Why wouldn't Jesus take care of us?

And if Jesus gave bread to the crowds once, won't he give us more blessings, more frequent blessings, blessings that last? That's what I want, Jesus. I want a checking account replenishing magically whenever the balance dips below \$200. I want an extra four hours extended onto my day when the impossible deadline looms. I want replacement knee joints and ear drum longevity and restored eyesight the moment my current parts start to wear out. I want schedules allowing me to get to the kids' games and answer all my emails and keep the house spotless and still pursue my hobbies. Jesus, give me this kind of bread.

When the crowds finally track Jesus down, they're in for a bit of a disappointment. Rather than satisfying their curiosity about how he got to Capernaum, he goes right past the words from their lips to the deeper concerns of their hearts. **"Do not work for food that spoils," Jesus tells them, "but for food that endures to eternal life."** (John 6:27) Jesus knows their hearts, understanding the mindset with which they approach him. Yet Jesus doesn't scold them for searching for the wrong thing or shame them for misplaced priorities. He gently and patiently instructs them about what they truly need.

So give us this bread. Give us the bread that doesn't spoil.

2. Not the way we expect to get it

After you've been able to do a little investigating to uncover the source of the positive changes in your cousin, you want to copy the recipe. You know it's not as simple as swallowing a pill. It's not a surgery vacuuming out everything unhealthy and replacing it with positivity. You understand getting what your cousin has requires work. You will have to expend some efforts. And that's ok. You expect him to give you a plan you can follow, some carefully scripted steps for you to walk in. You are willing to make the effort to get the results he now enjoys. The time and energy you invest won't be wasted.

Naturally, we assume the same is true for getting God's great and lasting blessings. Along with the crowd in Capernaum we respond: **"What must we do to do the works God requires?"** (John 6:28) We know we've got work to do in our lives. We know it will require real effort. You

want that better relationship with your family, so they can all be proud of you. You want to do a better job of encouraging your spouse instead of caving into the automatic bitterness when you come face to face with their selfishness. You want to be a good influence of the people who know you as a Christian and look up to you. But you know things about yourself that they can't see. You know how easily you get frustrated. You know how hard it is for you to stick with your plans and actually follow through, actually do what you need to do to get where you want to go.

Jesus again has to correct these misguided perceptions. This time it's not just about what Jesus gives, but about how he gives it to us. According to Jesus, we are using the wrong currency. It's not like trying to pay for a fabulous vacation package with Pesos or Canadian Dollars, instead of American greenbacks. It's like trying to cash in mutual funds, bank cds, and future Social Security benefits for a free travel package.

Jesus flips our expectations completely upside down. What can you do to get what Jesus has? Well, you can't actually DO anything. Jesus says: **"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."** (John 6:29) It doesn't require any effort on your part. The only thing necessary is a surrender of the heart to Jesus, receiving salvation freely from Him.

So give us this bread. Give us the bread without expiration without our own efforts.

3. So Give us Jesus

Jesus so catches the crowds off guard that they begin to question his authority to upend the conventional system. According to Jesus they were after the wrong things. When he helped them adjust expectations to get the things that last, he told them they were trying to get them the wrong way. Now it's time for a timeout. Wait just a second, Jesus. Who are you? What gives you the right to change the way everything is supposed to work in our lives? Are you better than Moses? Moses was the best hero of Judaism. David was an adulterer. Solomon had foreign wives. But Moses had earned, in their estimation, the highest human authority. Moses was a giver. He brought real and lasting benefits to God's people. And the miracles of Moses haven't been duplicated, much less surpassed in the 1500 years between his life and the coming of Jesus. In their minds, Jesus had done some pretty amazing things. But he was still no Moses. Don't lecture us Jesus, unless you've brought an entire nation through a sea and provided food for millions over the course of forty years.

But Moses wasn't really the main issue. Moses was just a distraction from the words of Jesus that offended and insulted them. When the crowd asked what work they could do, Jesus told them there was nothing they could do themselves to satisfy God's demands. Instead Jesus wanted to give them what God demands. They wanted Jesus to show, to teach, to help them do what they needed to do. But Jesus made it a gift. The works of God are yours. You have them through faith in Jesus. There is nothing you have to do, not even anything you can do. They are yours as a gift through faith in Jesus.

Of course, Moses had never done any of those things by his own power. It was the Father behind him the entire time. God was the giver and provider, the real miracle worker. And now

God has provided a greater miracle: **“My Father...gives you the true bread from heaven.”** (John 6:32) Better than anything from Moses, Jesus comes directly from God in heaven. Lasting longer than the daily manna, Jesus gives life. Spreading blessings beyond a single nation in the wilderness, Jesus gives life to the world. Jesus identifies himself: **“I am the bread of life.”** (John 6:35)

So give us this bread. Give us Jesus.

4. Bless us with lasting benefits through faith in Jesus

So give us this bread today. Give us the Bread of Life with the sure and certain benefits only Jesus can give. We are so consumed by what we need for each day that we don't have the desire or mental energy to consider anything deeper or more permanent. The Bread of Life nourishes us with hope beyond energy for each day, victory greater than an overflowing checking account, more meaningful than freedom from aches and pains. The Bread of Life fills our souls with more than a short-lived burst of energy. Jesus fills souls with an end to searching and seeking for something more. By faith in Jesus you have his perfection, his life, his forgiveness. The Bread of Life costs you nothing, requires nothing from you, expects no effort on your part. The Bread of Life fills you with lasting blessings, permanent benefits, eternal life. So give us this Bread. Give us Jesus.

And then keep giving us this Bread. Give us faith and increase our faith. Give us a desire to feed regularly and reliably. Create in us a hungering. Keep me hungering for the blessings Jesus wants to give. Keep me thirsting for nourishment only Jesus can deliver. Keep us thirsting for your Scriptures revealing your words and works. Keep us hungering for your Body and Blood at the altar delivering your forgiveness to our hearts. Satisfy your soul with his gifts.

A relaxing vacation can do wonders for your emotional wellbeing. Eating healthy, getting a good night's sleep, exercising regularly can give you more energy and a more positive outlook for each day. But only the Bread of Life can give true life, life with eternal benefits. Jesus, I want that! Give us that Bread!

Amen.