



11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 5, 2018
John 6:25-34

The Bread of Life... 2) Never Spoils

My family went to a church one Sunday which had a special treat after worship. They had planned to serve ice cream to celebrate Father's Day. After the service we channeled into the fellowship hall and enjoyed our ice cream. You can imagine how excited my two-year-old daughter was! I'm sure it was the first time she could ever remember a church giving her ice-cream. A few weeks later we ended up returning to that same church for a second time. It wasn't long into the service before a little voice started asking, "cream? ...cream?" How do you explain to such a small child that we didn't come back again for ice-cream? You can't blame her. This happens to Jesus a lot! In John 6 we see a whole crowd coming to him looking for the wrong thing. When it comes to Jesus, the Bread of Life, what should we be looking for? Jesus directs those who follow him to look for something unlike anything else we might crave.

Jesus now had a large crowd looking for him. He had just fed the 5000 with bread and fish until all were filled. We read last week how Jesus had to withdraw from the crowds after that miracle. He went up a mountainside alone. And the disciples went across the sea without him. You can imagine the reaction of the crowd the next morning. They wanted to find Jesus! They knew he hadn't gone across the lake with his disciples, but they didn't know where he went. So, many of them caught a boat ride back over the lake to find Jesus. They took the fastest way to the place where they would be most likely to find Jesus: Capernaum. Surprisingly they did find their provider-of-bread already back in Capernaum. "Teacher," they said, "when did you get here?" Over the night Jesus had in fact miraculously caught up to his disciples by walking on the water.

But Jesus wasn't exactly excited that the crowds were so enthusiastic about following him. He had to redirect some misguided priorities! They were seeking him for the wrong reasons. Jesus tells us exactly what drove the crowd to look for him! "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." They were looking for Jesus because they wanted more ordinary, earthly benefits from him. They themselves had eaten the bread the day before knowing full well that Jesus had miraculously provided that bread. But they couldn't see any significance beyond the fact that it made them feel satisfied! Their searching for Jesus was not much different than what you see cattle do when they know food is served. It was not so different from what fish in a tank do when they see the hand that feeds them. They had come searching for more benefits -more food- from Jesus. Jesus had to redirect the crowd to look beyond ordinary gifts to desire something far greater. *"Do not just work for food that spoils! The food you should be looking for is the one that endures eternally!"*

People are often caught up working for food that spoils. This can sometimes be all they look for from God. Look at our reading from Exodus this morning. The people of Israel complained, "If only we were in Egypt, we had as much *food* as we wanted." Even after God gave manna from heaven, enough for everyone, they persisted in this attitude. God made clear that his whole purpose in providing food for them was so that they would know, "that I am the Lord your God." But some didn't see beyond their bellies. They only tried to hoard up more manna overnight! "Thank you for the food God, can I have *more of this food?*"

Even today we see the same attitude toward Jesus. Sadly, he is still viewed by many as a quick fix for meeting ordinary needs – a dispenser of merely food that spoils. A few years ago, I was teaching a Bible Study in Milwaukee and a man came into the room from the street. This wasn't too surprising since the room also served as a food pantry and regularly offered help the community. I paused from teaching while he presented his appeal for "bus money." One of the church elders immediately recognized the appeal for money as a scam for quick cash. After the man was offered a free car ride (right after the bible study) he saw his need was not being met. He wanted cash, now. He left, seeing *no other use for Jesus*.

But are we always craving the right food as we come together in Jesus' name? What is most important when we gather? We want church to be full of comfort, warmth, and friendship. We want a suitable worship style, entertaining sermons, a strong sense of belonging, numerous fellowship activities, and a comfortable atmosphere on holidays. Some want childcare. Some want youth activities. Some want a support group. Some just want a socially active place to gather with like-minded people. Don't misunderstand me, earthly blessings like friendship, fellowship, and fun, are all good things. If we find these ordinary, earthly blessings at church they *are* a blessing from God. Some of them are even things which are necessary for a Christian church. But if our primary concern is to have these surface blessings met, the Bread of Life moves down on the menu. Would we ever allow these ordinary blessings to become the main thing we crave from our God?

Are we craving the right food in our own personal time, or is it sometimes only the food that spoils? Aren't there times when all of us would rather thank God for the chance to grab a late-night snack rather than a late-night devotion on his word? This has happened to me before! Sure, I might be quick to think, "Thank you God for the food," but at the same time I sometimes neglect to use my personal time for a far greater food. Have you ever found yourself becoming so eager for Sunday lunch or activities on Sunday afternoon that it upsets you when worship runs an extra 15 minutes long? I've sat in the pew and have been tempted to

hold such an attitude: less eager to feed on the Bread that really matters versus feeding my stomach. What is wrong with us that we sometimes only want to chase after things that spoil? We make the least important things into the most important!

We chase after a lot of things in life. The sad truth is nearly all of it will spoil in the end. "Do not work for food that spoils." When we are blessed by God with earthly blessings this fact always hits us: It cannot satisfy forever. It will not last. Even the best sealed products are stamped somewhere, "best if used by..." And no matter how much we crave and eat we are stuck with the sad truth that "by the sweat of our brow" we will work the ground to satisfy ourselves. We are just like Adam, who was not satisfied with all the trees of the garden and thought, "Just one more!" We too in our quest for more ordinary, earthly treats are faced with the same decree, "Surely you will die, dust you are and to dust you will return." We can work to put all the remedies, food, exercise, and preservatives that we want into our bodies. But each of us will still have our names stamped or carved somewhere: "born (year)- died (year)." We know we need something more than ordinary food! We need food that lasts!

Jesus directs us to what matters: "Food that endures to eternal life." He made it clear where we find it, "which the Son of Man will give you." And it was only from that man Jesus that we get what really matters. We might buy bread which is "certified organic" or "non-GMO" or bear a major company's label. Jesus has a stamp of approval as the Bread of Life. Only on Jesus did God the Father give approval as "the Bread of Life" which endures and never spoils. The Father's stamp of approval includes raising his Son from death. The Bread of Life never spoils, but last forever! Jesus clarified that this was a gift! When they responded, "What must we do to do the works God wants," Jesus turned their ideas upside down. "The work of God is this: that you believe in the one he has sent." He gives us Jesus as the Bread of Life. We don't buy him, we only trust in him.

The crowd that day still sought more earthly, ordinary benefit from Jesus. They asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" Basically saying, "Let me see those flakes at the top of the fish tank, or I'm not swimming all the way up there." *They still only focused on what satisfied them in an ordinary way!* Therefore, Jesus directs the crowd to see the true source of true bread. "I tell you the truth, 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. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." God's Son, Jesus, came down from heaven for this purpose: to *give life* to the world!

The Bread of Life lived with that focus always in mind. He didn't crave ordinary food, but rather said, "man does not live on bread alone." He lived perfectly, *always* putting his Father's eternal food before himself as something vital and of primary importance. He had his Father's approval. He lived that perfect life for us. And though the world did not value this perfect Bread from heaven, he came to give himself for us. As the soldiers crucified Jesus, they saw the only the garment of Jesus as something they wanted and valued. But what Jesus offered them was priceless: "Father, forgive them for my sake." And for all the times that we only wanted earthly benefits from God and ended up setting aside God's gift, Jesus pleads the same for us, "Father forgive them." All our wrongs were paid for by him on the cross once for all so that he can give us life. The Bread of God came down from heaven to give lasting nourishment and life to a world dead in sin.

And Jesus came from heaven not just to do something as small as feeding the Israelites in the wilderness with food for 40 years, but to give "life to the world.". This includes everyone. This includes me, and it *includes YOU*. And that life is not ours "by the sweat of your brow" but freely given to all who believe.

The crowd that morning, unfortunately, could not see beyond their stomachs. "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." *Instead of offering them the ordinary food they want, Jesus makes it clear that he himself is the source of such wonderful 'bread.'* All along Jesus has been speaking of something far greater than food: himself. "I am the bread of life." *All this centers on one man:* Our source of life is in JESUS! Far greater than Moses he is the "I AM" that sent Moses! He is the living God who rose victorious and defeated death on the cross! We will not remain dust but will share glorified, perfect bodies forever. With the benefits we get from Jesus will never need to beg, "*more, please.*" Why? Jesus promised: "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

All we do is centered on this bread, on Jesus! When we begin to put other lesser blessings and needs first we need to redirect our priorities. And we direct those who see the church as a chance to fill their pockets with bus change to the real source of real and lasting benefit! Jesus will take them not down the city street, but to the city whose foundations will never be shaken. We direct those who see the church building as simply "a nice place to have a wedding" to see beyond the ambiance and comfort to see eternal life from Jesus. We look beyond our own preferences for worship style, service times, and how the bread is sliced and served in worship to what is on the menu: The Bread of Life! We look beyond the temporary needs of our daily schedule to crave the gospel. We joyfully receive Jesus not for fifteen extra minutes but as the source of life for every second of our day and all eternity! We wake up every morning seeking what the Holy Spirit leads us to desire as we join Moses in saying, "Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love." And yes, we thank God for the late night snack, knowing especially that when our last night comes we have also been filled with Jesus! And remember as you see the young child who is apparently only sitting still in church because their mommy or daddy gives them cookies and treats, they are there with Jesus receiving a BREAD WHICH NEVER SPOILS.