

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 17, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 550:1-6, 659, 296, 293, 48.
Lessons: Psalm 78:10-33, Acts 2:36-47, John 6:23-40.
Sermon Text: John 6:33-35.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Several weeks ago we talked about the history of the woman at the well in Samaria and how Jesus is providing the water of eternal life for mankind,

Today Jesus uses another picture to show what it is that he provides for mankind. Our gospel lesson was chosen so that you would see the context of our sermon. When the people wanted what Jesus called the bread of life, we read *“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”* Today we need to be reminded that

BELEIVERS MUST CONTINUE TO FEED ON JESUS

- 1. Jesus is the real bread of life.**
- 2. All who believe this continue to feed on him.**

John has talked about the “Word” and how Jesus Christ is the Word of God. He has talked about light and how Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. Today we hear him telling us that Jesus Christ is the Bread of life.

I think that most nations have bread of some kind – tortillas, pita, loaves. It is pretty much a staple of life in many countries. It was certainly so in Palestine, where Jesus lived. As you heard last week, loaves of barley bread were the common food for most people. Only the wealthy had finer wheat bread. And meat or fish was more of a condiment, not the main feature of meals. And so we could say that bread is pretty much an essential of life. In a sense bread and water are the essentials. Of course, we are accustomed to thinking that “bread and water” is a bare subsistence diet, without any meat or vegetables or other things that we might think of as “good” things to eat. But we often end up eating a lot more than we really need, and isn’t it true that a very simple diet would suffice to give us nourishment adequate to keep our body and life? John’s gospel deals with the essentials of spiritual life: the Word of God, light, and now bread

It is not until this chapter that John mentions bread, and this chapter starts with the miracle reported in last week’s sermon, when Jesus fed more than 5000 men plus women and children with a simple meal of 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish.

The next day, people come to him looking for another sign, some sign to prove that he is the Messiah. They want someone who will provide them with food – earthly bread, just as they remembered that Moses provided their ancestors with manna in the wilderness. Earthly food is part of their picture of the Messiah, the prophet whom God will send, the king who will come to rule on the throne of David.

What they expect is totally wrong. Jesus came to serve. He came to earth *“to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:45) His role was not just to serve mankind bread or some other kind of earthly food. Last week you heard how Jesus fled to the mountain when people wanted to make him an earthly king just because he had fed them.

In the minds of the Jews in front of Jesus today, what Moses had done for them was important. Moses had fed their people – perhaps even a million people – in the desert wilderness with manna and quails and had provided earthly water for them to drink.

To many of them, manna – meaning food they didn't have to work for – sounded good. But they had forgotten how their ancestors "***grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!'***" (Numbers 21:4-5) The people to whom Jesus is talking had forgotten how tiresome and boring the manna came to be, and how they – that is, their ancestors – had come to detest, to hate, the manna. In their human short-sightedness they had come to think that all they needed was bread for which they did not have to work, earthly bread provided miraculously.

But Jesus makes it clear that they need a whole lot more than just earthly bread. And he is the real bread of life.

After all, what is really necessary for food? I am sure that we could subsist, and live quite comfortably on bread. But how often have we eaten the same food meal after meal? Not very often, if ever, for much more than a day or so. We have come to think – in our country – that variety in our menu and diet is absolutely essential. Yet in many countries, there is remarkably little change in diet from day to day for a great majority of people.

The people were looking for some special sign from Jesus so that they could claim to believe in him. If the people had understood Jesus' miraculous signs, they would have known that he was the Christ sent from God. Remember, his miracles were done so "***that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***" (John 20:31) The goal is that they would have received him as the Son of God and Savior. They should have thought more about their spiritual welfare – and what happens after death – than their bodily welfare. But that is human nature. We often think more about what is going to happen after church than what we are receiving from the Word of God, the Bread of life, during church.

Jesus had food to give them, but not the kind they wanted. His spiritual food provides eternal life. He came down to earth as the Son of Man, to give people eternal life. Jesus' true spiritual food is not junk food, empty calories, as it were. Jesus' words speak loud and clear to the materialistic people of every age. We need to listen today.

When hearts grow hard in unbelief, no miracle such as providing earthly food is enough to change that condition. These people had just seen Jesus multiply bread and fish to feed them, yet the next morning they asked him to give them a sign that would move them to believe. What is needed to change hearts is the Word of God – Law and especially Gospel.

Refusing to acknowledge Jesus' spiritual message, they referred to the manna from heaven that their ancestors ate under Moses in the wilderness. It's as if they were saying, 'If you're serious about getting us to believe in you, then at least do something like what Moses did. He gave the entire nation manna from heaven for 40 years.' Their argument was the ancient equivalent of measuring the growth of a church by the number of mouths fed through its soup kitchen.

Jesus IS the bread of life: "***For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'***"

God's Word, the bread that he gives us is unchanged and unchanging. When we feed on Jesus – his Words – and drink from him – again, from his Words – we will never be spiritually hungry and thirsty.

Most people are looking for something that will make them simply feel good without any mention of things like their sin. A church that preaches the law of God isn't very popular today. People flock to churches that preach some kind of 'gospel', that is, some kind of 'good news'. Well, we do preach the gospel here, the true gospel of Jesus Christ. We do show men their Savior from all their sins. We do proclaim good news. And there is nothing that makes that good news – the bread from heaven – sweeter and more nourishing than knowing why we need it. We need the true gospel because of our sins. We need to be told that our sins, our guilt, our shame is taken away on the cross by Jesus. Then the gospel will really mean something! Imagine being told that you have a huge buffet of great food waiting for you. That statement would make you much

more excited if you were hungry and knew you needed food. So it is with the Gospel. The Law shows our needs, the Gospel resolves those needs.

Jesus makes it clear that it was not Moses who gave the Jews manna from heaven, but his Father in heaven, who also gives the true Bread from heaven. Moses had nothing to do with the miracle of earthly bread. Jesus also speaks of spiritual bread. ***“Jesus said to them, ‘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.’”*** Standing before them is the true Bread from heaven given for all men by the Father. He came down from heaven with the purpose of giving eternal life to the world. Jesus the Savior is the Bread of God. He is truly the Bread from heaven and by His work of earning and giving salvation He establishes that fact beyond doubt.

The Jews really had no conception of what the Lord meant in speaking of this wonderful Bread. They begged Jesus that He would always give them bread. But many did not know really why they needed this bread of life. They didn’t recognize their sinfulness and their need of real bread leading to eternal life.

Notice that Jesus said that he himself is that Bread of Life. No matter who it is that comes to him, he will no longer be spiritually hungry, just as whoever drinks of the living water of his salvation will never again be spiritually thirsty. To come to Jesus means to believe in him as the Savior of the world. All the desires and longings of the soul find their complete gratification in him and his mercy.

But although the Son of God and his perfect satisfaction for all sins was brought so near to the Jews, yet they did not believe. They have seen him in his ministry of miracles, and they have heard the words of life which issued from his mouth at such times, but they have refused to believe.

To come to Jesus is to believe. Faith is a spiritual coming. All those people who actually come to Jesus are those whom the Father has given to him as his own. Faith is the result of God's merciful grace. Coming to Jesus is a call and election of grace, and as a result none of those who come to him in faith will the Lord cast out. God has no desire for the death of any sinner. To fulfill this merciful, kind purpose of his heavenly Father Jesus has come into the world. It is the will of the Father that Jesus lose none of those whom the Father has given him. They are all equally precious in his sight. The price to buy them from Satan was far too high. On the last day the Son will give to those whom the Father has given to him the full enjoyment of the blessings and the glory which are their heritage through faith in him. It is the will of the Father who sent the Son into the world that everyone who looks upon the Son in faith, who accepts him as the Son of God and their Savior, shall have eternal life and become partaker of the glories of heaven through the resurrection.

While we are on earth we have a chance to hear Jesus and to eat the bread of life. Once we are dead, there is no longer any chance. And we know from looking around us that death may come at any moment. We need Jesus, the real bread of life. We could think of words of the old song “I need thee, O I need thee; every hour I need thee; O bless me now, my Savior, O come to me.”

So what kind of bread are you going to eat? Jesus IS the bread of life. Many seek a spiritual bread that seems better, or tastier, or by human standards seems to be easier to swallow and sweeter. Many choose to set aside some of Jesus words, but your Savior told you to ***“obey everything I have commanded you.”*** (Matthew 28:20)

By the grace of God we believe these words: ***“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’”*** (John 6:35-40)

What a blessed joy to look forward to that eternal life given to us by the bread of life, Jesus. May we fill our souls devouring his words! Amen.