**John 6:24-35** August 5, 2018

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*John 6:24Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. 25When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”*

*26Jesus answered, “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. 27Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”*

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

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

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

*32Jesus 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. 33For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

*34“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”*

*35Then 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.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**There Is Bread—Then There Is REAL Bread**

Up in Detroit, Michigan, there is a startup company (Stock-X) that sells old shoes. Yep, old shoes. Sometimes twenty years old and more. That’s their business. Actually what they sell are unused or nearly unused old shoes, specializing in old collectible athletic shoes and some high end new shoes. Remember the black and red Air Jordan shoes from 1995? They might have them in stock today—for something in the neighborhood of $500! Business is great for this new company. One thing that brings people to their virtual door is their ability to sniff out the knock-offs and counterfeits—literally sniff them out. A box of those 1995 Air Jordans was recently delivered to their shop. They opened the box and an employee said, “These don’t smell right.” One of the 30 or so tests that they apply to all arrivals is the sniff test. They can sometimes literally smell out the counterfeits, knock-offs and the real McCoys. That’s what makes them their money.

Most of us can get taken in pretty easily. Oh sure, we like to imagine we are savvy and street-wise. Truth be told, we think we are smarter than we really are. So these shoe retailers do the tough work of making sure you get the real thing. Jesus is trying to do that same thing in John chapter 6.

A bunch of people had searched out Jesus, and they were fooled. Not that Jesus was a counterfeit, quite the opposite. They wanted Jesus to give them the counterfeit, while Jesus tried to give them the genuine article. Twenty-four hours before our reading, Jesus had been teaching great crowds. Then at the end of the day, out of his great compassion, he miraculously fed thousands from a single meal. You know how some people say there isn’t any such thing as free lunch? Well that day was the only time in human history there actually has been free lunch—other than the boy who got his lunch box expropriated by the Apostle Andrew. (Nice guy, that Andrew!)

People were so impressed with Jesus that they tried to make him their king. “Give us all the food we want, and we’ll make you king!” Jesus declined.

Under darkness of night Jesus walked away so he could get back to doing the important work, not baking bread or multiplying fish, but speaking the word of God. As soon as the now-hungry remnants of the crowd heard about it, they booked it on over to Capernaum. They tried to get Jesus talking. ***“Rabbi, when did you get here?”*** Jesus will have none of their manipulative small-talk. He went right at them, ***“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.”***

Besides being abrupt, Jesus’ statement sounds strange. He says, ***“You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”*** It wasn’t an either/or about seeing miraculous signs and eating all the bread they wanted. They did both. They both saw and ate. Then what is Jesus saying when he says, ***“You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill”*?** Jesus is saying, “You are following me, not because when you saw this miracle you thought to yourselves, ‘Wow! If he can do that, maybe we should think about who this guy might be!’ No, you are following me because you got what you wanted. You were hungry and you got a free lunch. That’s all you care about.”

If you have a pet dog, you know what Jesus is talking about. We have a dog. We really like our dog; our dog likes us. She is protective in her way. If any stranger comes to the door, she barks and barks and just won’t quit barking! But here’s the thing: if the “intruder” sits down at the table with a plate, she is suddenly right there, looking up at them with sad doggy eyes. At that point our dog really doesn’t care if it is family or thief. “Just give me the food.”

Jesus saw people just like that in front of him. They did not consider that the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 was a sign that Jesus is more than a man. All they cared about was free lunch. If the devil himself had given them a free meal, they would have followed him around. They were as unthinking as dogs. The couldn’t have cared less about Jesus as the Messiah, just that their bellies were (or had been) full. Jesus’ ***“miraculous sign”*** meant nothing to them. Signs are supposed to mean something.

When I was a child, we would sometimes be outside playing and in the middle of a weekday, for no apparent reason, the bell of the church next door would strike. It was one of those old one-ton church bells that echoed into the country-side. A ring, then a long pause, and then about ten seconds later, it would strike again. And again. Sometimes it would strike three times, sometimes eight times. You could never know. What was it saying? The tradition of that congregation was that when a member of that church passed away, the bell would toll, once for every decade of the life of the departed. Once I remember it tolling only one time. I had to ask my dad about that. “Dad, did you hear that? It only rang once.” He said, “Yes, just once. That’s right.” Whenever that bell tolled, it carried a much deeper meaning than mere clanging of metal upon metal.

Jesus tells the crowd around him, “That bread you ate yesterday, that came out of nowhere, it was not just a meal, not just bread. Lift up your eyes, engage your senses, pay attention. Who do you think I am?”

Don’t you hear Jesus’ concern for these people? He looks at them and sees people obsessed with things of little value. They have believed the lies of Satan and the appetites of their flesh. They chase after another meal, not the Son of God. ***“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”*** He looks at them and is filled with compassion, not because of their empty stomachs but because of their lost souls. They have no relationship with God. So he ignores their smokescreen and talks about what is really important.

Oh, and how we ought to heed Jesus’ words! Day by day we receive God’s blessings in our lives. Food, paychecks, smiles of friends, handshakes, words of support when we suffer, a sunrise, a sunset, a drink on the deck, an offer of help. We drink in these blessings from God day after day. Eager and happy when they come, annoyed and worried when we want for more, we rarely lift our eyes above that which makes our stomachs full and our minds happy. How often do we go to God in true prayer? How often do we listen to his word? Like these people before Jesus, we need to be confronted frequently and asked, “Pay attention to the real works of God: a Savior born, who lived a perfect life, who died an unjust death, for you. Do you understand? Do you care? Are you working for food that spoils, or treasuring food that endures?”

God forgive us for the times we hunger and thirst after this world’s things! Should not every item in this world turn us toward God who gives all? Should we not consider that there is something deeper to life than a paycheck, the next meal, a scholarship, the next party?

Jesus tells us too, ***“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”*** Oh, what sweet words from Jesus. ***“Which the Son of Man will give you.”***

But we know there is no such thing as free lunch in this world. The people before Jesus felt it, so they asked, ***“What must we do to do the works God requires?”*** They are so stuck on the ways of this world that they can’t hear the message from the one who comes from above. Like all the worldly bread they have ever had, they think they must work for the heavenly bread.

This worldly thinking is contained in their question: ***“What must we do?”*** You hear that sentiment all the time. When people pass away they say: “She was such a good person.” Yes, we can be thankful for that. But they are avoiding the big question: “Was she a Christian?” “I think so.” “What makes you think so?” “Well, she was so kind, caring, helpful.” “But was she a Christian?” “Oh I’m not sure. She hadn’t been to church for years. But she was so good!”

***“What must we do?”*** Jesus says, “That just won’t do!” ***“The word of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*** All the goodness in the world is worthless if one does not believe in Jesus himself. Don’t think that you can let your relationship to God wreck on the rocks, just as long as you are good and all that. That is what most people think. “I know I should be in church more often, listen to God’s word more. But I’ll just be real sure to be honest, return the money when the cashier gives me the wrong change, help my elderly neighbor get to the store, raise my kids to be hard workers.” Jesus says, ***“This is the work of God: to believe in the one he has sent.”*** [The Greek emphasizes “this”.]

Faith is not, telling Dad, “I need $20!” Getting it, running out to the car and taking off with friends to places that Dad and Mom may or may not approve of. That is what an awful lot of people think “believing in Jesus” means. “Yah, I knew he exists, and I can always wheedle out of him what I need, and usually what I want. And in the end he is just going to kind of let all the things I’ve done slide ’cuz I’m a decent guy at heart.” That isn’t faith. That’s manipulation, that’s exploitation, that is treating God like a fool and imagining that God won’t figure it out.

What is it to believe? It is to listen to Jesus as a student listens to her most revered professor. To believe is to look as a child looks to her mother for care and her father for approval and protection. That is the attitude of faith: to trust him for forgiveness and everything else; to believe that his answers are the right answers.

Then you have begun to enjoy true bread. ***“My Father gives you the true bread from heaven… The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world… I am the bread of life”*** (vv.26,33,35).

Maybe we miss what Jesus says when he is The Bread of Life.

Let me ask you this: what did you eat for supper last night, and lunch, and the day before, and the day before. You probably can’t remember because we are used a wide variety of foods.

Not in the ancient world. There you had bread every meal. Not this doughy white stuff that has all the fuel and nutrition bleached out of it. Real bread, like Mr. Reinheimer showed some of you how to bake a few weeks ago. People ate that kind of bread every meal, and they would have a little of vegetables and sometimes meat on the side, but bread was what provided the bulk of the nutrition and calories for life in every single meal of their life.

Thinking of bread in those terms—that there are no other alternatives for life—that’s what Jesus means when he tells us, ***“I am the bread of life.”*** Believe in Jesus. Hunger for Jesus. Pursue Jesus. He will satisfy you as the true bread from heaven. Bread that is not bought, but freely given by God through faith. Bread that does not pass away. Amen.