**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost—Symbols of Christ in Stained Glass: The Bread of Life**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY October 6, 2013**

**Based on John 6:43-59 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**Feast on life-giving bread!**

 **I. Sent from the Father**

 **II. Which alone satisfies spiritual hunger**

*43 “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. 44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” 59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.*

You walk through the door, wait in line, and now it’s your turn to order. You tell the employee standing behind the counter the sandwich you want. Then he asks you, “What type of bread would you like?” and if you’ve never been to Subway before, you realize this is actually somewhat of a decision. You’ve got choices and plenty of them…Monterey Cheddar, Honey Oat, Italian, Hearty Italian, Italian Herbs and Cheese, Sourdough, along with some others.

It’s not just Subway that offers a wide variety of bread. Throughout the world, the types and varieties are countless. You have flatbread and bread that rises with yeast. Breads that contain all different types of flours and grains. Breads that are used for different purposes—bread bowls, crackers, sandwich bread, garlic bread. There are a lot of different kinds of bread.

But this morning, let’s take a look at a different kind of bread. It’s not bread you find in grocery stores, restaurants, or bakeries. It’s bread that comes from the heavenly Father and offers eternal life. It’s bread that if you eat it for the rest of your life, you’ll never go hungry again. Jesus teaches us to **feast on this life-giving bread.** Bread **sent from the Father,** and **which alone satisfies spiritual hunger**.

**I. Sent from the Father**

Bread had played a part in one of Jesus’ most memorable miracles. There was a crowd of five thousand men and thousands of women and children gathered on a mountainside by the Sea of Galilee. They were listening to Jesus teach and preach. After they listened to Jesus for a number of hours, the people were hungry. So Jesus took five loaves of bread from a boy the disciples had brought to him, thanked his Father in heaven, then began to hand the loaves out to the people. In a way we can’t really explain, these five loaves of bread were enough to feed the thousands there and leave twelve baskets of leftovers. These people were astonished and were eager to see more from Jesus.

But Jesus managed to slip away from their sight for a while. The people weren’t able to find him for the rest of the day, so some decided to spend the night there on the mountain. Who knows? Maybe Jesus would be with them in the morning, they thought. The next day they woke up, found no signs of Jesus and decided to hop in a boat and head to a city called Capernaum. There they started their search.

They probably spent a good amount of time looking for him walking up and down the streets and asking people if they had seen him. Then they entered the synagogue. There they found Jesus.

As they walked through the door, they had no idea what lesson Jesus was going to teach now, but it would be an important one. Jesus looked directly at them and said, **“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. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life” (John 6:27).** Jesus had just taken care of their physical needs the day before by giving them bread to eat. Maybe the people thought if they kept following Jesus, he would continue to provide food for them. But Jesus was showing them a need that was more important. They needed to make spiritual nourishment a priority.

Jesus used a lesson from their own history to show that physical nourishment only had so much value. Their ancestors left Egypt and began their trek for the Promised Land, for the land of Israel. But because of their disobedience to God, he condemned them to wander for forty years in the wilderness. During that time the heavenly Father provided for their physical needs by sending bread from heaven called manna. So Jesus applied the lesson to his listeners, **“Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die” (John 6:49, 50)**.

Jesus told them, **“I am the bread of life” (v 48).** He was the bread that was **sent** **from the Father** to provide for their spiritual needs, he was the bread that would give them eternal life. But what did he mean exactly when he told them he was the Bread of Life? He explained, **“This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v 51)**. He was predicting his crucifixion. He was predicting his death. He was showing the Jews in the synagogue he was the bread that would save them from spiritual starvation and death. Jesus showed them **feasting on the life-giving bread sent from the Father** was more important than feasting on physical bread sent from the heavenly Father.

You see, our heavenly Father sends us two types of bread to nourish us, his children. He sends us the bread we find at Subway, Panera, Mcalister’s Deli and the grocery store, but he gives us Spiritual bread too. He gives us this spiritual bread in his Word and in the Sacraments.

But does it ever happen that you and I are so preoccupied with providing for our physical needs that we ignore our spiritual hunger? Do you take the opportunity for spiritual nourishment by coming to church on a Sunday morning a priority? Or are your priorities elsewhere? Going fishing or hunting? Going shopping at the mall? Sleeping a few extra hours and missing church? Not even considering freeing up Sunday morning on your work schedule? When you do these things, you neglect to feed your soul and become a little more spiritually hungry.

Sometimes you may even feel like you’re being spiritually fed, but you’re starving yourself without even realizing it. You wake up in the morning and say your prayers, but never crack open a Bible. You feel alright skipping worship and make up for it by watching religious programming on TV or listening to religious music on the radio. Both of these are, for the most part, just empty calories in your spiritual diet. You feel like your relationship with God is really strong so you don’t have to read his Word anymore or study it. I’ve done or thought some of these things, haven’t you too? When you do or think these things, you’re neglecting your spiritual food. You’re pushing **your life-giving bread sent from the Father** off the table. You starve yourself spiritually and you risk dying, or worse, will die a spiritual death.

**II. Which alone satisfies spiritual hunger**

But Jesus makes sure we will never starve ourselves spiritually. That’s why he took on human flesh and lived in our place. He never refused the nourishment his own Father in heaven made available for him. As a boy he was found in the temple courts receiving his spiritual food. As he talked with the teachers of Scripture there he learned more about his Father’s will for him. He willingly accepted his role to provide sustenance for a spiritually starving world. Throughout his time on earth he told his disciples and followers he would give his flesh on the cross—his very role as the Bread of Life.

And the best part is that he carried through on this mission to feed a sinful race in starvation. His flesh bore your sins and mine on the cross, even those sins of when you and I neglect to feed ourselves spiritually. And he took those exact sins and put them to death there, so you don’t have to die of spiritual starvation. And his blood was shed on that cross also. His blood purifies us from the spiritual blemishes caused by spiritual starvation. The blood he shed causes us to stand forgiven, holy, and blameless before the heavenly Father on the Last Day.

And for everyday in our lives, he places himself on the spiritual menu as the “special of the day.” He says, **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (v 54)**. This kind of sounds like Holy Communion, right? But that’s not what Jesus means when he says this. He’s talking about the exact moment his flesh and blood was offered on the cross. He’s telling us the message of the cross is the only spiritually satisfying food a person can find to fill themselves up with. This is the message that all of God’s Word centers on. This is the message that makes our hunger go away. Christ tells us the message of his death on the cross is the **life-giving bread which alone satisfies spiritual hunger**.

Just as you tend to your physical hunger by eating meals daily, so also you tend to your spiritual hunger by working time with Christ into your daily schedule. I usually start my day with prayer and time with God’s Word. I think of that like my spiritual breakfast, like morning toast. There are many different ways to provide spiritual meals for yourself. On the the racks on the back wall of the narthex behind you, there is a schedule you can follow to read through your Bible in three years. Maybe you’ll consider using that to get your spiritual bread. Our synod publishes Meditations based on God’s Word which can serve as a daily spiritual meal. There’s also a WELS Mobile app which provides daily devotions and readings from Scripture. Not to mention, a huge selection of devotional literature you can use to feed yourself with.

And one of the most special spiritual meals that you can take part in is the meal you share with your Spiritual family on Sunday morning at worship where you sing God’s Word together, hear it read, and hear it preached. After the service, Bible Study, Sunday school, and Confirmation class are offered to substantiate this meal. The Bread of Life is also received in Holy Communion because its focus is the message of Christ crucified. The apostle Paul explains, **“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).”**

Until The Lord comes in judgment on the Last Day, the spiritual food we receive on this earth is only an appetizer to the heavenly banquet we will share with God, all the angels, and all the believers in heaven. So continue to **feast on this life-giving bread**, until you join the heavenly banquet hall for all time!

Whatever your preference in bread is—white, wheat, rye, French—remember it’s **sent from the Father**. But also remember the other type of Bread that’s **sent from the Father** and not found in stores or restaurants. The bread that you will eat of and receive eternal life, the **bread which alone satisfies spiritual hunger**. **Feast on this life-giving bread.** Walk out of church today spiritually full. Hear Christ’s words once again, **“I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v 48-51).** Amen.