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IMPERISHABLE BREAD FOR ETERNAL LIFE

John 6:22-35; Proper 13B; Pentecost 11B; August 3-4, 2024

“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the Food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you... I AM the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.”

Some of those who ate the bread and fishes that Jesus multiplied came seeking Him again. Jesus knew why, and told them: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”** They did not deny this, but doubled down when Jesus challenged them to believe in Him. **“Then what sign do You do, that we may see and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”** Just like the Israelites before them, who focused on the manna rather than the God who gave them bread from heaven, they missed Jesus’ earlier point. **“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on Him God the Father has set His seal.”**

The hungry Israelites on their Exodus to the Promised Land grumbled against God, who gave them a sign, manna, daily bread from heaven to eat, to test whether they would walk in the way of God’s Law, the *Torah*, or not. God promised to rain on them bread from heaven, but they should gather only enough for that day; anything left over would spoil and perish (Ex. 16:19-20). Of course, some of them ignored God’s Word and tried to gather extra and save it for the next day, only to find that the saved manna was wormy the next day. Only on the sixth day, the day before the Sabbath, were they to gather enough manna for that day and the Day of Rest, when they should not do any work like gathering manna, and that set aside portion would not perish.

After Jesus died on the cross and was laid in the tomb, He rested on the Sabbath Day and His flesh did not see decay or corruption; Jesus, the true Bread from heaven, did not perish, spoil or rot when His flesh was set aside for the Sabbath. Jesus is our Bread from heaven, our Manna. He is the fulfillment of God’s plan of giving imperishable Bread for us to eat.

Jesus promises us imperishable Bread, **Food that endures to eternal life**. What is this Bread? Jesus tells us. **“I AM the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.”** How can we eat this Bread so we shall not hunger and drink so we shall never thirst? By faith, that is, by coming to Jesus as His disciples and believing in Him as the True Bread sent from God to give His life for the world. The primary focus of this section of John six is Jesus’ teaching faith in Him: who He is and what He came to do for us.

Jesus also teaches that our faith in Him is something that God works in us, not something we work in ourselves. The receiving of faith is something totally passive on our part. We cannot do anything to come to faith in Jesus; faith is fully and completely the work of God the Holy Spirit in us through God’s Holy Word and Sacraments. But once we are brought to faith, our faith does work. Coming to faith is something passive; living by faith is active.

What is true faith in Jesus? That is central to John six. When we get to the end of the chapter in a couple of weeks, we will hear how most of those who had been following Jesus as His disciples couldn’t stomach His teaching anymore and stopped following Him in faith. Will we accept Jesus for who He is and what He does? Will we follow Him as the One who has **words of eternal life**?

The sign Jesus did of multiplying bread and fishes for the 5,000 points to Him as the same God who gave Israelites manna in the wilderness. **“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the Food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on Him God the Father has set His seal... Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but My Father 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... I AM the Bread of Life.”** Jesus is the imperishable Food that endures to eternal life.

God the Father set His seal the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, His Son. When did He do that?

“Sealing” is the language of Baptism. When Jesus was baptized, He was sealed with the Holy Spirit and confirmed to be God’s Son by His heavenly Father who declared, **“This is My beloved Son.”** Sealed with the Holy Spirit and set apart to fulfill God’s Word, John the Baptist declared of Jesus, **“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** The Gospel of John emphasizes that the feeding of the 5,000 happened at Passover time when the lambs were slaughtered in remembrance of God’s saving work. At the first Passover, the flesh of the lamb was eaten together with unleavened bread to sustain the Israelites as they began their journey to the Promised Land, and God gave them manna to eat until they reached their destination.

Let’s put this together. Jesus, God’s Son and true God Himself, came down from heaven and became man. **The Word became flesh** and was baptized and sealed as **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** As **Bread from heaven, the Bread of Life,** Jesus our Passover Lamb, gave His flesh and shed His blood on the cross. The Bread from heaven did **not perish** when laid in the tomb, but rested on the Sabbath and then rose **imperishable** to raise us from the dead. Jesus’ words here in John six echo what He said earlier in John three. **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”** We believe in Jesus, true God and true Man, who is our Food that endures to eternal life. This faith in Jesus saves us.

Jesus challenged the Jews to believe in Him for eternal life, and they asked what they should do. **“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”** They thought that, if they did some good work, they could earn this imperishable food that Jesus was describing to them. This was backwards and wrongheaded. Faith is not our work, but God’s work in us. Jesus said, **“This is the work of God/God’s work, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”** Becoming a disciple of Jesus and believing in Him is not something we can do to be saved, but something only God does to save us. Jesus would say later to His disciples, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you”** (Jn 15:16a).

Being good Lutherans, we are familiar with the Small Catechism’s explanation of the Holy Spirit’s work in article three of the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe

in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Since the fall into sin, all of us are conceived and born with original sin as shown in unbelief, which condemns us to hell unless we are brought to faith in Jesus and receive His forgiveness. The Catechism’s explanation in its simplified form reminds us that faith is always and only God’s work: “I believe that I cannot... believe” unless God works this faith in me.

I know that a lot of our members enjoy listening to Christian radio and listen to or watch other religious media. Preachers and Bible teachers from a wide variety of viewpoints have their own shows. Wanting to listen to or watch wholesome things is commendable; all of us should avoid the trash that is so popular in our culture.

At the same time, I need to caution you. Not everything that is broadcast under the heading of “Christian” is necessarily faithful and true to God and His Word. There is a saying about food and our bodies: “You are what you eat.” Adapt this to faith in hearts: “You believe what you listen to.” Be careful and discerning about what you are listening to. It could be leading you away from true faith without you even noticing while it happens.

A false doctrine that is held by many on “Christian” media is sometimes described as “decision theology,” the false belief that we become Christians by choosing or deciding to believe in God. Don’t fall into the trap that faith is something you do for God. That will undermine your hope of salvation when you sin, leading you to question whether you even have faith in God because of your failures. Jesus said later in John six: **“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day”** (6:44). Don’t put your faith in your faith. Rather, put your faith in Jesus, who will never fail you.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” Jesus says: **“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the Food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you... I AM the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.”** Amen.