

11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 8, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 6:24-35
The Bread of Life

John 6:24–35 (NIV84)

Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶ Jesus 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. ²⁷ Do 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.” ²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” ³⁰ So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² 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. ³³ For 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.” ³⁵ 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.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Have you been watching some of the Olympic games? The athletes are amazing. They can jump and run and tumble and flip and more. I’m sure many of these athletes have dreamed of competing in the Olympics and now they have, some even winning a medal. They believed they could and they did. Now, it is difficult enough for an elite athlete to believe he or she can compete with the best in the world. I want you to believe something even more difficult. I want you to believe that I am going to compete and medal in the next summer Olympics. I only need to shave about 10 seconds off my best 400 meter race in high school, almost three decades ago. Can you make yourself believe that I could make the Olympic team in the 400 meters? No, I can’t either.

What about something even more difficult to believe? Can you make yourself believe that I am an elephant? Perhaps you could pretend that I am an elephant but you can’t force yourself to believe that I really am an elephant. That is not how belief works. One either believes something or they don’t. We can present arguments and evidence but we cannot make ourselves or anyone else believe. It works the same way with faith in Christ. This faith is only produced by the Holy Spirit. As Jesus talks with the crowds in John 6 today, we see him present truths to the crowd that are difficult to believe. But when the Holy Spirit gives us such faith in Christ, it is wonderful to receive those truths. Jesus tells us today that he is the Bread of Life.

Difficult to Believe

Jesus 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. ²⁷ Do 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."

Here are the first truths Jesus tells them that are difficult to believe. Jesus has just fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Now these people want more food from Jesus. So Jesus explains to them that the things of this world spoil so don't use all your energy on them. But that is what most people in this world do. Those with little material wealth in this world work to survive and spend their energy on getting by each day. Those with some material wealth focus on getting more. Those with plenty of material wealth focus on keeping what they have and getting more. Jesus says that working for food that spoils is foolish. And don't be fooled, all material things in this world will spoil, rust, rot, burn or be lost.

It is one thing for us to intellectually agree that the things of this world are not as important as eternal life, but it is another thing for us to actually believe this. For our thoughts, words and actions show what we believe. If our thoughts are usually focused on stuff, how to keep it, how to get more, what we don't have that we need, then our thoughts convict us of not believing what Jesus says. If our discussions are focused on worldly things, our words convict us of not believing what Jesus says. If our actions, our jobs, our work is only to acquire more material things, our actions convict us of not believing what Jesus says. The crowd following Jesus for more food and miracles was guilty of looking for earthly things from God and there are times we are too.

When Jesus promises to give them food that endures for eternal life, they are interested.

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

They completely miss the point. Jesus freely fed the five thousand. They did not have to work for that earthly food. Jesus promises them food for eternal life as a free gift as well. But the natural thinking of sinful man is that of work righteousness. So they ask what works they have to do to receive eternal life. What does God require of me? It is difficult to believe that I cannot do the works God requires. These people had been raised on the commandments of God. They knew the law. Surely they were aware that they had sinned against the law. But maybe they thought they were batting over .500. Maybe they thought they were keeping the law most of the time and only messed up once in a while. Maybe this Jesus can just give us one more rule to keep, one more work to do, that will put us over the top and then we can have eternal life.

Jesus turns their thinking and our natural thinking upside down.

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

What works does God require? Believe in Christ. But here is the most difficult part. You cannot make yourself believe. Faith is not a work that you can simply will yourself to do. It is not like training your body and making yourself go one more mile or do one more push up. The people wanted to do one more good work, keep one more law of God which they could force themselves to do. But to believe is not a work of our will. That I believe in Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit.

No one can simply decide to believe in Jesus as their Savior. Someone who says that they made a decision for Jesus already believed before they said those words. Sinful humans cannot make ourselves believe. But through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the word of God, we believe. Our work is to continue to believe in Christ. But even that is not something we do, but is instead something we receive and it is wonderful to receive.

Wonderful to Receive

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. ³³ For 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." ³⁵ 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."

Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life. He is better than the manna God gave to the people in the wilderness while they wandered forty years. That bread would spoil if kept for more than a day (or two over the Sabbath). Manna was only provided for forty years and then it was gone. Jesus, the bread of life, is with us more than once a day or six days a week. He is always with us. Jesus is not just for a small group wandering in the wilderness four decades. Jesus is for all the world for all of time.

Manna sustained the physical lives of the people. Jesus gives spiritual life through the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in him. We echo the request of the people, "Sir, from now on give us this bread." We want Jesus. We want the bread of life. And when we go to Jesus, he never disappoints, he never fails, he is never missing or busy.

We pray, forgive us our trespasses and he does. We sing "Abide with me, fast fall the eventide," and he is. We come before him with repentant hearts and receive bread and wine and he gives his true body and blood for our forgiveness, every time.

When our Savior says, "*He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty,*" it is almost as if he is challenging us to try. Try to use up all of Christ's love. Try to use up all of his forgiveness. Try to use up all of his compassion. If you try this with any sinful human, that person will run out of patience, compassion and forgiveness. But Jesus will never run out. You will never go to Jesus and come away starving for forgiveness. He will forgive. You will never go to Jesus hungering for mercy and return without mercy. He is always merciful to those who come to him. So just try to run Jesus out of spiritual blessings and you will never hunger or thirst again.

I hope you haven't spent the last minutes trying to convince yourselves that I am an elephant or that I am going to be running the 400m in the next Olympics. Not going to happen. But I pray that the Holy Spirit has strengthened your faith in Christ as the bread of life who gives us eternal life. May our God give us the continual desire to go to Jesus in this life until we are with him face to face in the next.

Amen.