

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of August 2, 2009

There is a Bread with No Expiry Date (John 6:22-35)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John:

Jesus said to them, "The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to Him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.' Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'"

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, today's passage is all about bread, that common staple food that's been around for thousands of years. It's amazing how often we eat bread...our toast in the morning...our pies and baked goods... Basically almost at every meal we have some sort of bread. In Bible times bread was the basic food each day. Wheat, buckwheat, and barley would be toasted over an open fire and eaten fresh. These were also ground into flour for baking bread on hot stoves.

But bread has always had a short expiry date, lasting little more than a few days. Sure we have fridges now but that only preserves it slightly longer. Eventually, if bread is not eaten it gets mouldy and it becomes no good.

In our text, our God has a solution for this old age problem. He does not give a new bread with a new and improved special recipe though; He gives something that satisfies long-term. He gives His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Bread that never expires. He is the staple that lasts for eternity.

Jesus gives a promise about His bread. He says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." This life that Jesus offers is found no where else in the world. People of every background basically want the same thing in life; happiness. The question is what makes us happy? There are countless articles in magazines, on the web, and on T.V. about how to live life to the fullest – how to be successful, how to manage our finances, how to get in shape, how to improve our relationships, and so on. But rarely do we ever hear in these articles about the ultimate source of happiness and contentment in this world. These things are but pieces of this puzzle of life. Jesus is life itself. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together, as Colossians 1:17 says.

Sadly, the state of faith in our society is rapidly declining. When it comes to belief in God, Canada's young people are a lot like previous generations except they increasingly view religion as relatively unimportant.

According to a federally sponsored study in 1989 called "Canada's Youth: Ready for Today", 84 percent of the young people surveyed said they believe in God and 81 percent in the divinity of Jesus. Those figures are almost identical to statistics of older Canadians. Over 80 percent of those surveyed said they would want a religious funeral or wedding; about 75 percent said they would involve a minister, priest, or rabbi in a birth-related rite. But only one in ten said that God has "a great deal" of influence on how they live. Further, only one in 200 said they look to a religious leader for counsel or assistance.

And certainly, since the time of this survey, young people and people in general have become only more distanced from the God of the Bible.

So what is wrong with our youth today? Why are they becoming less interested in God? Could it be that the problem is not just with our youth but with society in general as well? Why do people today see the Bible as less relevant in their day-to-day lives? Could it be that the problem is in how we view the Bible?

The sad truth is many people see the Bible as little more than a rule book for good living mixed in with some interesting stories. People by and large see religion as a list of do's and don'ts. But with this type of approach there is really very little appeal for most people. It is unappealing because a list of do's and don'ts has no heart and no life.

What we crave as a people is relationship. Studies have shown that what makes people happiest are meaningful relationships. And the Bible is all about relationship. The heart and centre of Scripture is Jesus Christ. And following Him is not about following rules but having a real relationship with a loving Saviour, with our Lord and God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus our friend and brother.

Other religions teach that if you want to get closer to God, if you want to love Him you need to try harder. It is a constant striving to make oneself right before God without any assurance of His love or forgiveness. But this is not God's will for you. The people asked Jesus after He had fed the 5000, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28-29).

In contrast to many other faiths where God is a far away, impersonal Judge God wants us to know Him as a God who has a merciful heart and who cares deeply for His children; who showed His deep love in the most profound way by dying for us on the cross and atoning for our sins. Praise be to God that through faith we have access to our Heavenly Father. He is not far off but has made our bodies His temple.

St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, chapter 6, "In Christ the only that counts is faith expressing itself through love". Through faith in Christ you have access to the Father; you have life in the Kingdom, and you have the God of love on your side. He does not need our good works but our neighbour does. We can't offer God anything except thanks for His love and mercy. And He sends us out to pass these things on to others.

It's not always easy to love people that's for sure. But the key is to remember the spring of life and the source of love. It is Christ. Our resources are limited. There's only so much

strength we can muster up. But with God there are no limits. St. John wrote in the fourth chapter of His first epistle, "We love because He first loved us". God's well of mercy goes way down deep. He invites us to draw on Him, to ask Him to love others through us.

Perhaps we have distance in some of our relationships; perhaps some of our relations with family members or friends are strained or nearly broken altogether. Through Jesus we have a Heavenly Father who will never leave us who can help us mend our brokenness and give us rest for our souls.

In Jesus we have a refuge, a safe haven, and life itself. We go to church not to feel that we are good Christians; we come to church to be with our Saviour who comes to us through His Word and Sacraments, who offers forgiveness for our sins. When we read our Bible it is not to do our good deed for the day, it is to feed on the Bread of life and to have our Lord strengthen our bond with Him. It is to listen to His Word of life, to have Him be the Lamp to our feet and the Light to our path. It is to have Him mould us in His image and guide us in His ways as a good Father raises his child.

This amazing relationship with God, this eternal life we have in Christ comes from the Word that we hear and that we read. As Romans 10 says, "Faith comes through hearing". When we eat the Body and drink the Blood in the Lord's Supper we receive Christ Himself in a special way and we literally chew on the life we have in Jesus. And when we devote ourselves to reading our Bibles we chew on the Word of life and He feeds our soul.

What would happen if we never had this Word? Where would we be without this life? Friends, we have a great deal to be thankful for, more than we can put into words really. Every week when we hear the Gospel message our faith is renewed. But what happens during the week when we step outside these church walls?

Scientists say that crash dieting is unhealthy. Any time the body is deprived of food it begins to shrink. It gets weak and begins to wither away. This can happen to the soul as well. Jesus says, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). If our soul is not fed on a regular basis with the Bread of life, with the Gospel of Christ then we suffer from spiritual anorexia. Do we want our spiritual life to be hanging on by a thread and consume only a scrap of bread once a week or less? Or do we want to be strong and well nourished and fit for service in the Kingdom?

When Jesus fed the 5000 He turned five loaves and two fish into a never ending supply. There is a never ending supply of food for our souls with Christ. We need to hear Him each day and meditate on His Words to us; for they are life itself.

As Luther once wrote in the Freedom of a Christian, "The soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul. If it has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light and peace, righteousness, salvation joy, liberty and wisdom, power, grace, glory and every incalculable blessing." May the Bread of Life empower and strengthen you in His service. Enjoy the Feast friends. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.