

"A Matter of Value"

John 6:22-25

August 2, 2015

10th Sunday After Pentecost

Many of you are fans of professional football. (I'm not. I'm a fan of the Chicago Bears.)

During the fall months you enjoy watching the games of the NFL which stands for the National Football League. However, with all the rules and penalties put into place against football players' on field celebrating, dancing, and other forms of self-expression, some say that NFL means the No Fun League. Those who like on field celebrating say the league is trying to outlaw fun.

Some accuse the Church of being a No Fun League simply because the Church seems to be against so many good and enjoyable things. Is that a fair assessment? Ultimately, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what things the Church is against. It only matters what things God is against. So, that begs the question: what things is God against?

The answer is: surprisingly few things. God created everything in this world good. It is not wrong or sinful for us to actually enjoy God's creation. We are not to live as hermits or in some sort of bare bones existence. The Scriptures say, "God...richly provides us with everything to enjoy." (1 Tim. 6:17)

However, we can use good things in sinful ways and God is against that. Sexual activity, a good gift from God, becomes sinful when done outside the context of a Biblical marriage; alcohol, something God gave to "gladden the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15), becomes sinful when it leads to drunkenness; and many other things. God is not against these good things, but the wrong usages of good things.

But what about other things which are often criticized and even condemned within the Church? What about sports, money, material possessions, sleeping in, weekend camping trips, jobs that take up all of one's time, and so on? Does God condemn these things? He does not – not at all. Neither does Jesus.

Our text for today occurs the day after Jesus fed 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish. Jesus is not against people wanting or needing the things of this world. Jesus shows this by providing food for people in abundance. The only thing Jesus is against is the misplaced value that people place on the things of this world. He is blunt in his criticism of the men in our text. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” In other words, “You are not interested in the forgiveness, life, and salvation which I came to bring and of which the loaves and fish were signs. You just wanted to fill your bellies.”

Sometimes pastors and faithful church members can go off on rants about people’s (usually OTHER people’s) priorities with regard to some of the things of this world which I talked about before. They can sound angry and give the impression that some of the things we have, use, and enjoy are actually sinful.

Jesus is different here. He doesn’t condemn the things of this world. He doesn’t really rant against these men. Rather, He seems more disappointed with these men because their choices...our choices...just don’t make sense.

Jesus says, “Do not labor for the food that perishes.” The problem with the things – the “food” - of this life is that it does not and cannot last. Sin has corrupted not only us, but everything in this world. Everything that we work so hard to obtain, maintain, and retain will eventually perish. Anything we have will be consumed, used up, break down, decay, be stolen, or destroyed. Since many people – especially younger people – don’t think past tomorrow, this saying of Jesus may not seem important. “Enjoy all that you can right now,” is what they may think. But there will come a time when everything that we have will fail us, including our own bodies, and we will be left with nothing and we will die.

Jesus invites us to, “[Labor] for the food that endures to eternal life.” Jesus is making the startling claim that there is something which DOES last forever. It is never fully consumed. It cannot be broken or destroyed by moth. It will never be stolen by a thief. Not only will this food last forever like no other thing can, but it gives what nothing we have can give: eternal life. This is not more of

this kind of life: full of pain, suffering, sorrow, and death. This is life as God intended for it to be: full of joy, peace, happiness, and in the direct presence of God Himself.

What is this wondrous thing – this supernatural food - that lasts forever and gives us life forever? It is Jesus Himself. Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Jesus is eternal and provides a way for us to live eternally. When we have what Jesus provides, we will never hunger or thirst again. In other words, we will be totally and forever satisfied.

Now, if we are willing to give so much time to achieve our goals in this life, work so hard to establish the life style we want for ourselves on this earth, and pay so much money to have our electronic toys – none of which will last, how much time would you give, how hard would you work, how much money would you be willing to part with to have something that lasts forever and allows you to live forever? Well, you don’t have to worry about that. Jesus says He will give it to us.

The fact that Jesus gives it to us freely does not mean that it cost Him nothing to obtain. Jesus paid a price – a steep price – to be able to give us life that lasts forever and fulfills all our desires and needs forever. He paid with His life. By offering His life on a cross for us and in our place, sin – that which corrupts us and all the things in this world which we strive so hard to obtain – has been forgiven and removed from our account before God.

That’s not all. Jesus did more than simply stop the corruption which prevented us from having life. Jesus did what was necessary to obtain life for us forever. He overcame death and came back to live forevermore in the joy and peace of heaven so that He might be able to give us that same kind of life after we died – a life of joy, peace, and satisfaction with Him forever.

Many people, when they hear of such an offer, may react in the same way that people react to television commercials for products that promise extraordinary results: “What’s the catch?” What’s required of me to get the same results? The Jews in Jesus’ time thought the same. They equated the bread by which they were fed in the desert with the Torah – the book of the Law. When Jesus

encouraged them to “[Labor] for the food that endures to eternal life,” they said, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”

This would be a good time for Jesus, if He were so inclined, to list a set of requirements to obtain eternal life: Be good, stop having fun, and go to church. But He doesn't. The answer He gives is amazing. Jesus says, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” Wow! No long list of do's and don'ts. No giving up fun. Simply, believe in Jesus Christ and trust in His merit instead of your own.

“Ah,” you say, “but He says we must believe. That is a work we must do for God, right?” Wrong! Not only has Jesus done everything to overcome and forgive sin and obtain and give eternal life, He also gives us the faith to receive it. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9) He gives that faith to you when you are baptized or hear the Word of God. That faith receives the gift of eternal life and the joy and contentment that go along with it.

Neither Jesus nor the Church is against fun or the things that give us enjoyment when used in God-pleasing ways. The question has always been one of priority and balance. Will you devote your time, energy, and resources to the things of this world which will not last and not help you to last? Or, will you devote your time, energy, and resources to the gifts of God which Jesus comes among us to give which not only last eternally but cause us to last eternally as well? It's not a question of what you “have” to do, but what you “want” to do; not what you “can” enjoy, but what will give you the most lasting enjoyment in the long run.

There is an old bumper sticker that says, “He who dies with the most toys wins”, a saying which pretty much sums up our culture's attitude towards things and obtaining them. This led to a bumper sticker response to that which said, “He who dies with the most toys still dies.” This sums up the futility of materialism and finding lasting joy in material things. So, enjoy all the things which God has created and given to you to enjoy. But value that which has lasting value and can give you

eternal joy. Seek after the unique gifts which Jesus has for you in His Word and Sacraments and can give you life and joy forever. You will at peace now and you will rejoice forever. Amen.