

"Better Bread"

John 6:48-51

August 12, 2018

12th Sunday After Pentecost

When I was growing up, I always remembered the advertisements on television for Wonder Bread and its claims that it could "build strong healthy bodies in 12 different ways". Now I believed this because Wonder Bread tasted good and because Captain Kangaroo told me it was true. However, we rarely had it in our house and there is no way I could ever get it in our house today. It's plain white bread. We want a better bread -- one that is high in grain, high in fiber, and high in nutrients. Now it might not be high in taste. The things that are good for us sometimes aren't. However, with all of these vitamins, nutrients, fiber, and so on, such bread will do a better job of what food is supposed to do: support and strengthen our bodies and lives.

Bread and other food is a very important part of our lives. Without food, you will die. It's no wonder then that the Israelites were so enthralled with Jesus when He fed the crowd of 5,000 with five small loaves of bread and two fish which we read about a couple of weeks ago. The Scripture says they wanted to make him king by force. For they saw in Him a permanent meal ticket -- someone who could provide them with all the food and all the physical necessities they would ever want or need to support their lives. If they had that, they thought, then they would be truly content.

There is only one problem with food, however. Although it can taste good and nourish and sustain our lives, it cannot keep us alive forever. Jesus reminded the people of this in our text. Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 was not the first time God had miraculously provided food for His people. When Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the Sinai Desert, there was precious little food. So, every day, God provided them with a strange bread-like substance which the Bible describes as being "white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey". The Israelites named this bread *manna* which is Hebrew for "What is this?" Yet, despite this miraculous food, Jesus said, "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died."

The same is true for us, not only with food, but for all of the things of this life which we so desperately want to have and think we need: money, a big house, a nice car, great clothes, HD TV's, cell phones, Ipods, and so on. There is no doubt that some of these things do help support our lives while others add pleasure to our lives. We work so hard to obtain them and give so much time to care for them and enjoy them. However, like bread, they cannot keep us satisfied or alive forever.

We live in a world that has been corrupted by sin and separated from its Creator. This was not God's intention in the beginning. When God finished His work of creation, the Bible says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." He intended it to remain that way. He created people - you and I - to live with Him forever. He created food to as a means to sustain us in that life.

Yet sin changed all of that. Humanity's rebellion against their Creator corrupted His creation and brought death where life had been before. That's what you, as human beings, inherit from the moment you are born - yes, even from the moment you are conceived. Sin corrupts you and brings death to you. And now the food we consume that was to sustain our life only serves to prolong our life until death consumes us.

Jesus came to offer a new and better kind of food - one that would not merely prolong life on this earth, but give life that would continue forever. In contrast to the bread that sustained the Israelites in their desert wanderings and that sustains us in our wanderings on this earth, Jesus says, "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Jesus came to be the means - the food, if you will - that would give us, not mere physical life in this world full of sorrow, pain, and problems. Jesus came down from heaven to give us a new spiritual life with Him in heaven that would last eternally. He did that by giving Himself - His own flesh and His own blood - on behalf of or in place of the entire world. He offered up His own body on the cross as the sacrifice for sin necessary to bring the world back to God again. His resurrection means that this sacrifice has been accepted and this reconciliation has been accomplished successfully. The food that gives eternal life is now here and available to all.

However, even the best of food does no good if it is not eaten. Imagine cooking a juicy steak on the grill and just watching it cook. Or, imagine going into a restaurant and just sitting there, inhaling the aroma of gourmet food as it is being prepared. Imagine taking a twelve week course on cooking but then never touching any food. Imagine discussing food, but never actually eating any. The food that is out there must, in some way, be brought into your belly to do you any good. Without that, you could have the finest food in the world, but you would still starve to death.

This is exactly what is happening in the hearts and lives of many people today. Jesus Christ is the bread of life, the living bread from heaven, who came to give eternal life to the entire world. Many people look on Jesus Christ as a very fine man and religious figure. Some will visit a church now and again out of some sort of religious duty. Some like to talk about religion. But none of that does anyone any good. Jesus said, "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." That Bread of Life must be eaten - incorporated within us in order to benefit us. But many people are not eating.

There are literally millions of people in the world who are starving to spiritual death because they have not yet had contact with the Bread of Life. But what about you? Are you eating the bread of life or are you filling up on the junk food of this world - wealth, pleasure, and the toys of this age? Real junk food - sweets, fast food, and other such stuff - tastes good, but will not nourish you. If you eat only junk food, you will eventually become malnourished. You need good, solidly healthy food to maintain a healthy body. In the same way, the spiritual junk foods of this age - money, material things, the latest spiritual, emotional or political fad - taste good - are enjoyable, but they will not nourish your soul. If you maintain a steady diet of that, your spiritual life will become malnourished and could even die. You need the Bread of Life to create and maintain a healthy spiritual life.

How do you eat this Bread of Life? The Good News is that He who is the Bread of Life - the sustenance that we need - is also the one who serves the meal. You don't have to go out and look for it. He has come into your life through your baptism to give it to you. That was your first meal of the Bread of Life. He created a faith within you that hungers for that Bread of Life more and more.

He continues to feed you with that Bread through His Word. When you pick up that Bible at home and read it, you are being fed with the Bread of Life. When you come here to hear the Word of God read and preached, you are being fed with the Bread of life. When you approach the Lord's Altar for Holy Communion, you quite literally feed on the Bread of Life as you receive His very flesh with the bread and His blood with the wine in your mouth. In all of these various ways, you are receiving Christ into your heart. He nourishes your spiritual life by strengthening your faith in Him. He gives you the life, starting right here and now, that will last forever and ever.

I fear that some in this congregation are on a starvation diet with the Bread of Life. They have lost their hunger for it or have had it replaced with a hunger for something else. Imagine eating physical food only on Sundays..and not every Sunday at that. Imagine neglecting food and not eating during the week because you are too busy and want to do other things. Imagine being hungry and eating only junk food instead of nourishing food. At best, you will become weak and ill; at worst, you will starve yourselves to death. Food benefits our physical lives when eaten regularly.

The same holds true for the Bread of Life. Make no mistake about it. If you neglect the Bread of Life or feed on something else, you will, at best, have a very weak spiritual life and, at worst, you run the risk of starving yourself to death spiritually. Incorporating Christ into your life on a regular basis is the only way for you to gain the benefits of it. Being here to receive the Bread of Life in Word and Sacrament is very good and most important. However, let Christ feed you on a daily basis. Read His Word individually on a regular basis or listen to it on your Ipod as you go about your daily business. Make plans to attend a Bible Class here at church so that you may be fed the Bread of Life with fellow Christians.

The result is not time wasted from your busy schedule - any more than sitting down to a meal "wastes" your time. Instead, however, your spiritual life will be renewed, rejuvenated, and strengthened. You will have the abundant life that Christ promises beginning now and lasting an eternity.

This was the first year since our family has lived here that I didn't attend the Montana State Fair, something I always enjoyed. As a child, I enjoyed fairs because of the rides. I knew that I had become an adult when the highlight of fairs like was not riding the rides, but eating all the food the fair has to offer. Many, like myself, look forward to the fair for that very reason -- the food. No one forces you to go for that. But you have a hunger and the Fair offers everything from a Viking on a stick to "cow pies" to corn dogs to satisfy that hunger. We willingly go there to be satisfied. May you have such a hunger, not for junk food, but for a relationship with your God and for a new life. Come here and God will satisfy that hunger. For here is the Bread of Life - in worship services and in Bible Classes. Let Christ feed You with Himself through His Word. You'll never go hungry. You will be satisfied. And you will live forever. Amen.