



Grace Lutheran Church
Valentine, NE

MAIL MINISTRY

The 4th Sunday in Lent

March 11, 2018

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 125

Hymns: 140:1, 4, 6; 296; 54

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10
2 Corinthians 7:4-10

Sermon Text: John 6:47-51

Jesus said: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

In Christ Jesus, the Son of God and our Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

I would like you to imagine yourself at your favorite restaurant having just finished an excellent meal. You push yourself away from the table. Your tummy is full and you are completely satisfied. How long does that satisfaction last? It lasts perhaps for the rest of that day, but more than likely for most of us just a few hours. Then we are hungry again. Imagine yourself buying a brand, new car—the car of your dreams. It is just the right model at just the right price. It is just the right color and has all of the bells and whistles you have always wanted. It rides like a dream, and you could not be more satisfied! How long does that satisfaction last? Does it last as long as the new car smell lasts, or perhaps until you get the first ding in its finish? Imagine yourself shopping for a new suit or a new dress to wear to an important public event. You shop at numerous stores and find just the right suit or dress. It is stylish, beautiful, comfortable, and fits just right. You go to your event and your friends cannot stop commenting about how good you look. You could not be more satisfied. How long does that satisfaction last? Does it last until next year’s styles come out, or until you snag the material on the corner of the kitchen counter, or until you spill coffee on it at the office?

What is the point of these illustrations? The point is that we can be satisfied with many different things under many different circumstances, but that satisfaction does not last. After time it begins to wane and in the end it simply disappears. The truth of the matter is that there is only one thing that will truly satisfy us and ultimately never disappoint us. That one thing, as Jesus puts it in our text, is *“the bread which comes down from heaven.”* That *“bread”* is Jesus! Let us consider today a small portion of what has come to be known as Jesus’ “Bread of Life” sermon. In that sermon we learn that **JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE!** We are encouraged to **consume Him by faith and** are promised that we will **be forever satisfied**, while we are warned that if we **consume anything else**, we will **never be satisfied!**

I.

St. Augustine, a Fourth Century Christian theologian and church father, observed so very aptly: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until its rests in YOU!” (*Confessions*, Lib 1, 1-2, 2.5, 5: CSEL 33, 1-5). Jesus came into this world to bring us rest! He once extended this invitation: *“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Mt. 11:28). Sadly, many of us become so preoccupied attempting to find rest and thereby to satisfy ourselves on our own, that we fail to hear or heed Jesus. This is what happened to the majority of the people who listened to Jesus’ “Bread of Life” sermon.

That sermon and our text are set into the context of the middle of Jesus’ three-year ministry on this earth. He was at the pinnacle of His popularity. Literally thousands of people came to hear Him speak and to witness His many miracles of healing. He had just on the previous day performed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. That miracle had led, however, to a confrontation. John

tells us earlier in this sixth chapter that many of those who had been following Jesus and who had been fed through that miracle wanted to *“take Him by force to make Him king”* (Jn. 6:15). The idea of having a king who would keep their bellies full and satisfied without having to lift so much as a finger on their own was very appealing to many. Jesus, however, had not come into this world to be a “bread” king. He had come to save men’s souls. Consequently, He sent His disciples away by boat in order to prevent such ideas from taking root in their minds, and He slipped away from the crowds to be by Himself on a nearby mountain. That night Jesus appeared to His disciples walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a storm as His disciples struggled to row across to their home base in Capernaum. It was during that same storm that Peter requested to walk on water with Jesus, and Jesus had to save him from drowning when his fear overcame his faith. In the morning when the people could not find Jesus anywhere near the mountain, they returned to Capernaum and found Him there. They still wanted to make Jesus their king, and so He admonished them: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him”* (Jn. 6:26-27).

These words began Jesus’ “Bread of Life” sermon. In that sermon Jesus proclaimed: *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (Jn. 6:35-40).

The people listening were perplexed and troubled. They had their eyes on this life, not the life to come. They viewed Jesus as their ticket to physical support and temporal success in this world, but Jesus was talking about having come down from heaven and being sent to take people back to heaven. Besides, Jesus was claiming God as His “Father” and suggesting that He too was God, for He was using the “I AM” phrase generally reserved for God to describe Himself. After all, was that not what He was claiming when He said *“I am the bread of life.”* These people knew Jesus’ background. They knew that He had been raised in Nazareth. They knew His parents, Mary and Joseph. How could He claim to have come from heaven? How could He claim to be God? Being a prophet, they were willing to grant; becoming their king, they even desired; but to claim to be divine...that was simply too much!

Jesus responded with the words of our text: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”* **JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE** sent by God the Father to bestow life—everlasting life to all who “eat of it,” that is all who believe in Jesus as the Son of God sent to save the world from sin and Satan, from death and hell. Jesus alone provides the solution for sin and its consequent guilt. He alone can end bondage to Satan. He alone has removed fear from the subject of death. He alone can save from the fires of hell. If anyone **consumes Him by faith, he will be forever satisfied!**

The problem is for us, however, even as it was for many of the people of Jesus’ day—a focus on this life and a striving for satisfaction in so many ways other than in Christ! We are a goals-oriented society. We establish goals and we strive to meet goals. Even as believers we can so very easily focus our spiritual life and our prayer life on the achieving of our personal goals. We ask Jesus to help us fulfill those goals, assuming that thereby we will ultimately achieve meaning and find satisfaction in life. But the achievement of our personal goals does not bring lasting satisfaction. We can easily find ourselves putting Jesus to the test: “Jesus, if only You will grant me this blessing, then I will know that You are true God and the One in whom I should trust! Then I will be so very

faithful to You!” But Jesus is not a genie in a bottle, nor is He the One to whom we ought turn only when we need Him! He is so much more! **HE IS THE BREAD OF LIFE!** It is when we are led by the Spirit to put our entire faith and trust in Him as the Forgiver of our sins, the Guide of our thoughts, the Provider of our bodies, the Protector of our souls, and the Lord of all of life that we are truly **consuming Him by faith**, and will find that we will **be forever satisfied!**

II.

Such faith, however, is seldom found! It was rare in Jesus’ day, even as it remains rare in our own. Jesus explained why in this very sermon: *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.... It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing!”* (Jn. 6:44, 63) The results of Jesus’ sermon that day are recorded by John: *“Many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it? ... From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”* (Jn. 6:60, 66) There is a grave danger for all of us to be misled by the people and the things of this world. It is so easy to be distracted by the glitter and the glamour, the privileges and the opportunities. We can so easily be led to assume that if only I had this, or if only I had that...then I would be satisfied and all would be well. But that is not true, not if we do not have as our central focus our Lord Jesus Christ!

All that glitters is not gold, as the old saying goes. James’ words are just as true today as they were when given in warning to the Christians of the 1st Century: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”* (James 1:12-17). We must realize that if we **consume anything else** other than Jesus, the Bread of Life, we will **never be satisfied!**

Some time ago I watched a short video cited on thechristians.com website. It featured an interview of a doctor who only recently had come to faith in Jesus. He had grown up in a non-Christian home, was very talented, very driven, and very successful. He was also very self-centered and at times, according to the testimony of his wife, quite hard to live with. He had an extremely successful medical practice, became very wealthy, and used that wealth to indulge himself and his family in things he thought would bring them and him great satisfaction. But he commented that no matter how much he indulged in all the pleasures his money and success could buy, he had a gnawing empty feeling within his being. It was only when he began to read the Bible that he came to understand his own sins, that he came to know about Jesus and the fact that Jesus had come into this world to die for his sins and in order to secure for him life beyond this world, that he finally found true peace. It was also through that faith that he found true transformation and change from his former selfishness to a genuine selflessness.

My dear friends, St. Augustine was right! We will only calm our restless souls when we find rest in God! His Son, **JESUS CHRIST IS THE BREAD OF LIFE! Consume Him by faith and be forever satisfied! Consume anything else** and you will **never be satisfied!** Amen!

--Pastor Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be glory!

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