Sermon on John 6: 24 – 35 – What Are You Hungry For?

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. 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...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.”

What are you looking for out of life? What would make you happy? More money in the bank? King Solomon once wrote, “whoever loves money, never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.” King Solomon had money in the bank and then some. A bigger home? More stuff? Jesus tells us, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” So what are you looking for out of life? What would make you happy? Better health? Better employment? More respect? Even if God gave you everything you asked for, everything you wanted, would you really be happy and would it really be for your good?

In many ways, God gave the Children of Israel everything they wanted. They cried out for freedom, God gave them that. Before they left, God gave them provisions for their trip. We’re told, “the Israelites...asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.” But silver and gold won’t do you much good if there’s no food to buy. God took care of that with bread known as manna for breakfast in the morning and birds known as quail for dinner at night. “Do you need something to wash it down? Allow me to provide fresh water. I can even make it spring forth from a rock.”

God gave them what they asked for. He even gave them what they didn’t ask for, making sure that their clothing and shoes didn’t wear out throughout forty years of wandering in the wilderness. In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, he led them through a savage wilderness and brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. He drove out their enemies before them. He gave them homes that they didn’t build. Fields and vineyards that they didn’t plant. They wanted the good life. God gave them that. He loved his people. There wasn’t anything he wouldn’t do for them. And how did they repay Him for his kindness? They grumbled and complained. They neglected His Word. They disobeyed His commandments. They worshipped other gods. Years later the Apostle Paul wrote, “God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.” Most of them never reached the Promised Land of Canaan. Even more tragic was the truth that those who died in unbelief never reached the Promised Land of Heaven either.

They had it all and they took it for granted. They failed to see that what they needed the most in life was right in front of them. Paul would later write, “theirs is the adoption as sons, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ who is God over all, forever praised!” Blessing after blessing after blessing. Miracle after miracle after miracle. For the Children of Israel, it was never enough. What about you? Will it ever be enough?

Our text for today takes place the day after Jesus had fed thousands of people with only five loaves of bread and two small fish. The crowds ate and had their fill. Now they wanted more. They had forgotten about the giver and were more focused on the gifts. With their mouths they called Jesus “Rabbi,” meaning teacher. With their hearts they proved that they were unwilling to listen and learn. They came looking for more miracles. They came looking to make Jesus a bread king, someone who would always make sure they had enough food to eat. Jesus was more than willing to provide food, but not the kind of food they expected. Jesus told them, “do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

But instead of focusing on the word “give,” the people there focused on the word “work.” “What must we do to do the works God requires?” they asked. That’s what work-righteousness teaches and believes. Something that’s a part of us all by nature. Work-righteousness doesn’t focus on what God gives us. It focuses on what we must give God. Give God an honest day’s work for an honest days wages and he’ll give you the paycheck of an eternity in heaven because you’ve earned it. But it doesn’t work that way because Paul writes, “the wages of sin is death...and...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The glory of God says, “be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.” The glory of God says, “keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” The glory of God reveals the sad truth that we haven’t always loved God with all our
heart, soul, mind, and strength and we certainly haven’t always loved our neighbor as ourselves. The glory of God reveals the sad truth that we don’t deserve a spot in the Promised Land of Heaven, rather we deserve a spot in the Outer Darkness of Hell.

“Hi ho, Hi ho, it’s off to work we go.” Such is the song on the lips of many in today’s world. The great lengths to which they’re willing to go hoping to earn heaven, not believing that the only way to heaven is through Jesus, God’s greatest gift. “Prove it,” was the response of the people that day. “What miraculous sign will you give us? Moses gave us bread every day! What will you do for us?” We find ourselves in another election year. Candidates are going to great lengths to win your vote. What will you do for me? How will you make my life better? How will you make me happy? Who are you going to believe? Who’s going to keep his promises? Who shares your values and ideas as to the way this country should be run?

To the people gathered there that day and to the people gathered here today, Jesus says, “here’s what I’ll do for you. You might not have a job or the job that you want, but in me, you have someone who did the job you couldn’t do. For the times you’ve grumbled and complained and failed to be content, I never grumbled and complained and was always content. For the times you failed to love God and your neighbor as yourself, I loved God and my neighbors perfectly. Through my death and resurrection, my perfect life is yours and your sins have been forgiven. You want more? Here’s something else I’ve done for you. For the times you’ve looked at physical treasures and found them lacking, rest assured that spiritual and eternal treasures are yours in abundance. You also have my promise that I’ll give you the physical resources you need for your body and life. Here’s another thing I’ve done for you. You might never achieve the status you want in life, but you already have a status higher than anything this world could provide. You’re a child of God and an heir to an eternity in heaven.”

What more could you ask for? What more could you need? The lives of so many people living in this world are like a puzzle with one missing piece. Something that drives you crazy until you find it. Something that drives people to plug in pieces that don’t fit. Money, possessions, fame, fortune. Like a square peg in a round hole, these pieces don’t fit. Life consumes them until they are consumed by it. The only piece that fits is Jesus. Once that piece is in place, the puzzle is complete and life has purpose and meaning. It changes the way we see things. It helps us understand the words of Jesus who says, “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.”

For those who want to know the work that God requires, Jesus says, stop working and start believing. “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” Even believing isn’t a work we do. Faith is worked in us by the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. As Paul writes, “faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.” Faith is given through the message. Faith is strengthened through the message. Spend time in the message. Spend time in His House. Spend time in His Word. The “work” you put into these things will be blessed by God as you will be blessed by God.

Because even the finest of earthly food will still find you hungry the next morning. But not the food that is ours in Jesus. “Sir, give us this bread,” was the reply of the crowd that day. They were so close and yet so far away. When Jesus told them that he was this bread, many no longer followed him. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” was the question Jesus asked the Twelve. One of those twelve, a disciple by the name of Peter would reply, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” May God strengthen us to say and do likewise!

The crowd gathered that day was looking for miracles, but for them, no miracle would ever be enough. They didn’t realize that the greatest miracle was standing right in front of them. God himself had come to dwell with people. God himself had come to live and die for his people so that they could live with him in heaven. They didn’t see this because they were hungry for earthly things. What about you? What Are You Hungry For In Life? I. Don’t work for food that spoils. II. Look to Jesus for food that lasts. God’s greatest miracle is found in Jesus. What a miracle it is! That God himself lived, died, and rose again for you. That God himself chose and called you to be his own. That he not only feeds you with daily bread but gives you the Bread of Life to fill you for time and eternity. What are you looking for out of life? What would make you happy? Everything you truly need is already yours. May we never fail to see that! Maybe you wouldn’t describe your life as “living the dream,” but in Jesus, you are living the dream with the promise of an eternity that will far surpass your wildest dreams! So forget the Snickers bars, Jesus alone is the food that truly satisfies!

Amen.