

**“Food That Gives Life”**

August 6, 2006

John 6:24-35

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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<sup>24</sup>So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. <sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” <sup>28</sup>Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” <sup>30</sup>So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?” <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup>They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” <sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

## Prayer.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning is a continuation of last Sunday's Gospel which included the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, then walking across the Sea of Galilee to still a storm. This morning, the crowd realizes that Jesus gave them the slip in the middle of the night, so they set out in boats to find him. It is easy to imagine the crowds rowing into shore, getting out of their boats, coming to Jesus, and in an attitude that is half inquisitive and half frustration, they ask, “When did you come here?”

In this dialog with the crowd, banter back and forth between Jesus and his growing band of zealots that follow him across the countryside, Jesus does a great job answering questions and unveiling hidden motives. In the process of doing so, on three occasions, Jesus uses the opening as an opportunity to slide into the conversation some new content, some new pearls of truth and wisdom that are at the core of this passage.

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As latter day observers of the Word, as people removed by over 2,000 years and in a completely different cultural universe, ***that's what we are looking for – the pearls of truth and wisdom of Jesus***, that transcends time and space, and can be applied to our condition today.

Question #1: Rabbi, when did you come here?

Answer: You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill. **Pearl of truth: Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.**

Nobody is more guilty than I am of obsessing about food. It is always on my mind. What am I to do about my next meal? Where? With whom? And how much is it going to cost? This is true especially when I'm on the road. It is also true when my work involves food. I have to constantly remind myself that when I'm in a work environment, the food is secondary to what is more important – and that is conversation, relationship with others.

Food that cues the appetite to desire more ... is food that perishes. So what is the food that endures for eternal life?

The only things that are eternal are God and our individual souls. So, what food nourishes God and our soul? That which feeds and supports our relationship with God. This is what Jesus tells us we are to work for: all things that allows us to draw nearer and closer to God.

There may be many things that drive us away from God – they fall into the category of temptation and sin – but there are many things that builds our relationship with God. Attention to prayer, regular reading of scripture, sustained worship, confession and repentance, outreach to our neighbor, and sharing the Gospel – just to name a few. These are the food items that we are to work for.

Question #2: What is the work of God?

Answer: "That you believe in him whom he has sent." **Pearl of truth: it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven and it is His desire that we believe in Jesus.**

The source of all that sustains us is our Heavenly Father (please excuse the gender specific metaphor). Our Heavenly Father has some very maternal attributes, such as tenderness, loving, and nurturing care.

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It is the will of our Heavenly Father that we believe in Jesus, the one whom He has sent into the world. This doesn't mean that we have to understand Jesus to believe in Jesus. Faith is an essential component of belief. We don't need to have a developed set of structured proofs or doctrines. We just need to believe in Him.

I strongly feel that belief should drive a life-long curiosity, a never ending desire to learn more about Jesus – where he went, who he encountered, how he handled himself, his teaching, his parables, his miracles, his motives. As we satisfy this curiosity over our life we cultivate a growing body of understanding about our Savior. Our belief is supported by the blessings of an approving Heavenly Father

Jesus tells the crowd, “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Question #3 isn't so much a question as it is a demand of the crowd: Sir, give us this bread.

Reply: I am that bread. I am the Bread of Life. **Pearl of truth: It is Jesus who sustains us.**

Those who obey the will of the Heavenly Father, who believe in Jesus, no longer need to worry about the earthly, mortal concerns of the world. We don't need to be looking for the free lunch, the means to support our children or families or even ourselves. In an irreverent sort of way, it could be said that Jesus has become our free lunch.

Be forewarned, however; free doesn't mean cheap. This doesn't mean that we should all quit our jobs and gather in a field to await the end of the world (as some idiots would suggest).

It does mean that, from here on out, we need to think of our employment not in terms of what it can do for me, but in terms of what it will allow me to do for God, and by extension, what I can do for the benefit of God's kingdom.

Jesus sustains our every need. I can't explain fully this free grace of God. We've done nothing to deserve it, nothing to earn it. This grace, symbolized by the bread and wine of Holy Communion, is given to us and there is no bill attached to be paid at the register before leaving.

It is by this grace that our families are fed and clothed, sustained for our every need. It is by this grace that none of us ever need walk alone through the valley of the shadow of death, as, inevitably, we all must do at one point or another. It is by this grace that we are given the strength necessary to resist every temptation dangled before us. It is by

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this grace that we are forgiven of our sins. It is by this grace that our labors bear fruit, that God's kingdom is advanced, and, in the end, we can rest assured that what may be an ending here on earth is nothing more than a new beginning into eternal life with God in heaven.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Today, he invites you to this table to feast upon him, find nourishment, and to never be in want again. Won't you come and join me?

Amen.

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