

# Sermon for Proper 13B

The Text: John 6:24-35

Earlier in John 6 Jesus tested His disciples. Our Lord asked the disciples, to feed thousands of people with a handful of food. Christ waited for them to respond in faith, and ask Him, the Son of God, to help them. They did not. They failed the test of faith. Philip and Andrew only saw an impossible situation they could not overcome. Thankfully, Christ is merciful and He overcame the problem for them. He demonstrated His divine power and multiplied 5 loaves and 2 fishes into a meal for thousands of hungry mouths, and in doing so encouraged the disciples to believe He is the Son of God and to trust in His power.

Our gospel reading for today follows just after on the *Feeding of the Five Thousand*. Today we learn the crowd's reaction to eating miraculously meal Jesus gave them from a few loaves and fishes. They crowd wants to make Jesus their king, because He filled their stomachs without them lifting a finger. They saw Him as a never-ending basket of provision, a monarch who would keep their bellies full. He would give them whatever they wanted. They saw the sign Jesus did. They ate His miraculous food. But they focused on the food, and not He who fed them. They looked only with human eyes, and not with eyes of faith. They thought of the meal more than the power of God at work pointing to Jesus being more than a prophet, more than an earthly king. They saw Jesus, but didn't see heavens King.

Jesus warns the crowd not to place the appetite of the belly above the nourishment of the soul, saying, "Do not labour for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you".

Jesus is making a distinction between food for the body and food for the soul. Jesus is not saying to forget the physical and only focus on the spiritual. He created us. He knows we need to eat to keep our bodies alive and healthy. But what we put in our mouth is only of value to us while we live. The greater food Jesus speaks of gives life

to our bodies and souls life after this life. He is talking about eternal life.

The crowd still don't understand that He is more than man; that He is God in the flesh. And from what Jesus just told them, the word that caught their attention was, work. And so, they ask, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" The Jews are used to thinking of eternal life as a reward for effort. They think of obedience as a means to pleasing God, so that He grants us His blessings.

But is that just a Jewish way of thinking? Don't most people assume that God rewards those who do the right thing? Reward for effort is part of our spiritual DNA. We think in terms of 'I'll scratch Your back and You save my skin'.

All other religions operate this way. At their centre is a list of demands or good works or right thinking or right ways of living, that earn the favour of their deity so they can receive a reward. If you give the right sacrifice, pray the right prayer, do the correct spiritual exercise, you get what you want. Well, that's how it's supposed to work anyway.

Of course, the Christian faith has a list of demands also. God gives many commandments in Scripture. He expects us to keep them, all of them, no matter how counter cultural one might be at any given time. The commandments even promise salvation if you obey them. But as we all know, none of us can perfectly keep the holy Law of God, no matter how good our intentions.

And that is the point of the Law. It is given to expose our sin, our rebellion, and all the ways we don't please God. God's commandments reveal our deep need for forgiveness. We are damned by the Law. We need someone to rescue us. And so, the Law prepares us to hear the Good News that God has saved us in His Son. The commandments puts us in the right frame of mind so we can hear the Gospel as good news, and trust in God's gracious love in for us in Christ Jesus.

Hearing the crowd's love of works Jesus makes this simple but profound statement, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent". Jesus' words have a double meaning. Firstly, faith is God's work in us, or to put in more simply: God gives us faith to believe in the One He has sent. He gives us His Holy Spirit to

opens the eyes of our heart to see Jesus as our Saviour from the wrath of God. The Spirit gives us faith. What is left to do, but believe?

And that is the second part: believe. Use your God given faith and trust in Him with all your heart, soul, mind, strength.

What an extraordinarily generous God we serve. He gives Jesus to save us from sin. He gives us His Holy Spirit and faith to believe in Christ. And He gives us opportunities every day to use our God given faith.

When God gives gifts, the only thing left to do is to receive it in faith. God loves us and we trust Him. That's what Jesus is looking for from the crowd: faith. Eyes that see beyond the physical miracle to the underlying miracle of God in the flesh, descended to earth to grant gifts that endure to eternal life.

The crowd challenges Jesus to repeat His miracle of the loaves, so that He might match Moses' miracle of supplying 40 years of manna. The crowd still cannot see beyond earthly blessings. Their understanding is dominated by the greed of their stomachs.

The bread Jesus fed them was like the manna Israel was given in the wilderness. Both were a sign that God was at work. Both show that God is not only interested in our earthly existence, but also in leading us through this wilderness, and on to a land flowing with milk and honey. If God miraculously supplies earthly food, will He not also grant everlasting food, otherwise what is the point of life on earth, but an eternal death?

And that is why Jesus has come. He descended from heaven to be our Rescuer. He took all our sins—our rebellion, our lustful thoughts, our idols—on Himself, and He died on the cross. And if they were on Him, they are not on you. They have been buried with Him in death. On the third day He rose again, they did not. He rose victorious over sin and death and the devil.

Jesus was cut off from life, so you can have eternal life. He rose to lead us all through this barren wilderness, and on to the Promised Land above. He promises to feed you what you need. In the Word He speaks of His victory sin and death for you. In His Supper, He feeds you His body and blood in, with and under bread and wine, feeding you forgiveness, strengthening your faith, giving you eternal

life. Jesus is “the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

God has saved you in His Son, and that is why you “believe in the One He has sent.” Not just with your mind. But with your heart, and your mouth and your whole body and life. He came to proclaim the free gift of God’s forgiveness and love.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Greater than manna in the wilderness or loaves on the mountain side, Jesus gives life to the world. He is Father’s gift to us sin ravaged creatures. He is the food that endure to eternal life.

Don’t put your belly above you soul. Feed your body and nourish your soul with the life giving Word of God. The psalmist says of God’s Word, How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth (Ps 119:103). Let the Word of God that proclaims Christ as your Lord and Saviour be on your lips. Come to the Divine Service and hear the Word of God that brings repentance and grants forgiveness.

Come to worship with a hungry faith to receive Christ in the Sacrament, the place He has given for His disciples to eat and drink Him. In faithful obedience we bring the meagre elements of bread and wine to Christ in thanksgiving. He speaks His words over them to make them a meal of forgiveness, peace, and life. None of this is our work. God does it all. All that’s left for us to do is to hear and trust what God is doing.

Let us praise God with songs of thanksgiving for His goodness to us. Let our lives be filled with thanksgiving and praise to God as we live according to His commands. Let us use our God given faith and face challenges by calling on the name of the Lord to help, to strengthen and to overcome. Feast on the Bread of Life and real life is yours now and in eternity. Amen