

The Fourth Sunday After The Epiphany

Sermon Text: John 6:28-35

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. (KJV)

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

In our Gospel reading for today, (John 6: 1-15) we read how a great multitude, numbering in the thousands of people, had either witnessed or heard of the miracles of the healing of physical sickness which Jesus had been performing. They were full of eager desire and excitement at the prospect of being witness to any other miracles which Jesus might perform in their presence.

And they are not disappointed, for when there is no place nearby to buy food Jesus miraculously satisfies the hunger of their bodies with but five barley loaves and two small fishes.

And now, having been eye-witnesses and they themselves the physical recipients of the miraculous feeding, these people intended to have Jesus as their king.

But the Lord, knowing full well of their designs, leaves their midst to be alone. Jesus' disciples, the meanwhile, board ship to cross over to Capernaum.

And so thwarted in their initial attempts to confront Jesus, the people, assuming Jesus would be with his disciples, follow them over the Sea of Tiberias.

In what seems to be a collective and utter desperation to have as their king this man who can so easily and completely meet their earthly needs, they shrink from no labor to find Him.

Jesus, who knows what is in the heart of each and everyone of them says to them,

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.”

Then Jesus adds, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed."

Here Jesus tells them that the reason for their interest in Him is wrong. They had indeed seen with their own eyes signs of who He was, but their thoughts and desires were still bound first and foremost to the things of this earth, and so they lacked the understanding that these miracles were the indisputable proofs of Jesus' divinity, of the fact that Jesus is the One promised by God to be the Deliverer, the Redeemer and Savior of all mankind.

They were more concerned with possessing the good health of their bodies and having enough food to fill their bellies than they were with the eternal salvation of their souls.

And are we not guilty of the same, when we so easily find the time to exercise our bodies, watch Saturday and Sunday sports games on television, gossip with neighbors, or feed our stomachs, but we don't seem to have time for reading and study of God's Word on a daily basis?

Dear Christians, Let us resolve to amend our lives with the aid of the Holy Spirit, so that we give proper attention to our need for the wholesome *spiritual* food given us in God's Holy Word!

Jesus desires to open the eyes of His hearers to the truth of the Gospel by telling them (and us) that they should work diligently, not for bodily food, which perishes, but rather for the food which lasts into life everlasting.

He wants all those who would follow Him to know that the purpose of His ministry, is *not* to fulfill the desires of sinful man for transitory things, for money and material goods, for things that rust and decay, nor is the purpose of His ministry to promote "economic and social justice", as many false churches of our day assert, but His *sole* purpose in coming to this world was to bring man back from spiritual death unto spiritual life in God and freely give him the gift of everlasting life.

Jesus wants the people of His time, and us as well, to realize that the miracles which He performed clearly show that God had sealed Him, had commissioned Him, as His Minister to give the food which comes from heaven and that it is Jesus and Jesus alone who can provide mankind with that one food truly and most dearly needed... the spiritual food that would secure for all mankind the costly redemption of their eternal souls and bring them into eternal life in heaven.

Not because of anything man deserves or could ever falsely hope to merit, *for that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23), but solely out of His divine goodness and mercy, God gives to us the forgiveness of all our sins, grants newness of life and eternal salvation.

Dear Ones, Jesus led a sinless life in our stead. As our Substitute, He was horribly tortured and put to death in our place, for our sins.

His death on the cross in our place, brings to the whole world the free gift of the forgiveness of sins, full reconciliation and peace between God and man, and the blessing of everlasting life with Him in heaven.

Now some of the people in the multitude, missed the point Jesus would impress upon them. They instead focused upon the statement of Jesus that they should labor to acquire food with such wonderful powers.

Like the modern day Jew and many who claim to be Christians in our day, they wanted to know what works they should do in order to be earn for themselves a place at the table where they might partake of this wonderful food.

You see, they were, of their own volition, locked into the notion that they must work, that they must somehow merit and earn their salvation.

But Jesus immediately corrects them. He says:

"This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.

Jesus here tells them and us that there is only one thing they and we should or could do and that is *to believe* on Him whom God has sent.

But what does it mean to believe, to have faith?

In what are we to have faith?

And where does faith come from?

The Bible tells us that faith is that free gift of God worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart of man by hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ that lays hold of the Forgiveness of Sins and Salvation.

To believe in Jesus Christ doesn't require that you have what some refer to as "a religious experience". It doesn't require a fit of laughter, speaking in tongues, or "feeling" the power of the Holy Spirit in the room or upon one's body. Faith is not about "feelings". Nor is true faith any notion of "having faith in faith".

It simply means that as the result of the gift of faith worked in your heart by the Holy Spirit through the Word, you have abandoned all thoughts of self-merit or worthiness where your salvation is concerned.

It means you place your complete trust and utter reliance upon the merits of Jesus Christ alone as full satisfaction before God for all your many sins.

It means that by that gift of faith you lay hold of, grasp, hold fast and personally apprehend the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation offered to the whole world in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Now let us be clear, Faith DOES NOT merit (or earn) anyone salvation.

Nor does faith add anything to Christ's work of redemption for us.

Faith is nothing more (and nothing less), than the hand that receives the precious Gift of Salvation.

Living a sanctified life in thought, word and deeds (actions) DOES NOT save any human being.

Living a life dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ and His bride the Church is a *fruit* of faith, *NOT* the *cause* of faith or man's redemption from sin, death and eternal damnation.

As our Lord Jesus declared as He died upon the Cross of Calvary: "*It is finished.*"

And so, Dear Ones, The Work of man's Salvation IS COMPLETED --- **in Christ Alone!**

Full satisfaction for the sins of the whole world was accomplished, *once and for all* when Jesus Christ gave His life as a ransom for all.

There is *no more* to be done... absolutely nothing that needs to be added to the cause of man's redemption.

But when God the Holy Spirit has worked faith in the heart of man through the hearing of the Gospel, when spiritual life and light has been created where once there was only darkness and death, then man is active in accepting *by faith* that wonderful food which nourishes unto eternal life.

And so faith is required of man. It is an act of reason and will, implanted and worked in us by the Holy Spirit; as we confess in the Third Article in Luther's Catechism: "*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*"

God doesn't do man's believing for Him. He rather looks for faith in man as the instrument or manner by which the full grace of God is appropriated.

The blessing of life, then, is not ours *because* of our faith, but *by and through* faith we believe and receive the unmerited gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

Now the Jews of our text were not ready to believe in Christ. They were not even ready to accept what He had to say.

They first wanted assurance. They required proof that Jesus was "worthy" of such trust.

For we find them in verse thirty of our text asking for a sign such as the giving of bread from heaven to their forefathers by Moses. Clearly they still considered Moses and the prophets greater than Jesus, and yet the testimony of God and His servants was not enough for them.

In the following verses Jesus therefore proclaims His glory.

"Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not bread from heaven; but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the Bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world."

Christ thus places Himself far above Moses and all the Prophets, not only in His person, but also in His works.

This then is His Epiphany:

"I am the Bread of Life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

Beloved of God, Jesus freely gives to you, Himself, the Bread of Life, so that you, *by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone*, might have the Forgiveness of all your sins, Life and Salvation.

Believe on Jesus Christ and you *shall* be saved!

For, Christ Jesus IS the True Bread of Life. To Him be all the Glory, forever and ever. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, the true Bread of God. Amen.