



Grace Lutheran Church
Valentine, NE

MAIL MINISTRY

5th Sunday after Epiphany

February 10, 2019

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 92

Hymns: CW 580 (TLH 537); LSB 589 (TLH 296);
TLH 54

Scripture Readings: Jeremiah 18:1-10
1 John 4:7-17

In Jesus' Name

Text: John 6:26-35

Jesus answered them and said, "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." Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

In Christ Jesus, the "Bread of Life," dear fellow redeemed:

In our children's sermon this morning I spoke of "God-math," a creative idea I borrowed from a children's devotional book written by Sally Lloyd-Jones, a British author living in New York City. "God-math" refers to divine concepts or miracles involving math that are beyond human comprehension. For instance, consider the fact that there are three persons in the Holy Trinity yet one God rather than three gods— $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. Or consider the fact that five loaves of barley bread plus two small fish equaled 5,000 full bellies and twelve baskets of leftovers—one basket for each of the disciples. Jesus wanted them and us to know that God will always take care of His children's needs at any time, in any place, and under any circumstances. "God-math" does not make sense to our rational minds, but it is always true and can be accepted by our Spirit-enlightened minds!

Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 sets the immediate context for the conversations recorded in our text. That miracle took place the day before these conversations. After feeding 5,000 men besides women and children with only five loaves of barley bread and two small fish, we are told that "*Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king*" (John 6:15). Jesus, therefore, left the crowds to go up into a nearby mountain while His disciples returned to their boat to cross the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. That night Jesus approached His disciples in the middle of the sea walking on the water as they struggled to row amidst a growing storm. They were at first afraid when they saw Him, but so very relieved when He entered the boat and it was immediately and miraculously transported to the beach outside Capernaum (cf. John 6:16-21).

It was the next day when the crowds, knowing that Jesus had not departed with His disciples but failing to find Jesus on the distant shores, returned to Capernaum themselves and, upon finding Jesus there, approached Him with an obvious question: "*Rabbi, when did You come here?*" (John 6:25) Our text is Jesus' response and introduction to His "Bread of Life" sermon. As we shall see, that response contains one admonition, one invitation, and two encouragements. In "God-math" that means $1 + 1 + 2 = 4\text{-ever!}$ Let's discover this morning how that it true!

I.

We begin with **one admonition!** In response to the peoples' question, Jesus said: *"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."* The admonition *"do not labor for the food which perishes"* would be better translated: *"Stop working for the food which perishes!"* It implies an ongoing activity already in progress—something Jesus said they were to stop!

The day before they were prepared to force Him to become their king—a bread king who would take care of all of their physical needs. It would be great, they thought, not to work for daily bread, but simply to sit down and have Jesus miraculously feed them each day. But that was one of the very problems Jesus had in mind when He told them to stop thinking about and working to meet their physical needs. One meal would always have to follow the next, because they would always crave more. The physical bread and fish meal Jesus had provided the day before was limited in its ability to bless, for it was finite and temporal. Jesus had not come to provide a temporary respite from physical hunger. He had come to provide spiritual bread, which would completely satisfy their souls and lead to their reception of the gift of everlasting life. Their physical, temporal desires were blinding them to their spiritual, eternal needs! "Stop doing that," Jesus admonished them. Instead, labor *"for the food which endures to everlasting life!"* This is what God the Father had sent Jesus to bring them—something that would not simply nourish their bodies for a couple hours, but which would nourish their souls forever!

My dear friends, the people of Jesus' day are not the only ones guilty of such errors of judgment and action. Every one of us needs to hear Jesus' admonition, for every one of us has our sinful flesh which will try to keep our eyes, minds, and hearts focused on the physical things of this life and world. We all need to make a living. We expend great amounts of time and a good deal of effort to accomplish that temporal goal. But with what attitude of mind and heart do we do so, and at what cost to our spiritual lives and eternal destiny? If our pursuit to make a living dominates our thinking; if our goal becomes simply to accumulate wealth; if we believe we will be secure if we just have enough money; if our chief goal is to enjoy the fruits of our labors; if God, the Giver of *"every good gift and every perfect gift"* (James 1:17), becomes for us simply a "genie in the bottle," who is to serve us by giving us what we want, rather than remaining our Lord whom we serve, then Jesus has something to say to us—**one** very important **admonition—stop working for the food that perishes!** It does not and will not give you the peace, the happiness, the fulfillment, the joy God wants you to possess...not just for a short time in this life but for all of eternity! **1 + 1 + 2 = 4-ever!**

II.

Consider now Jesus' **one invitation!** In response to Jesus' admonition, the people asked Jesus another question: *"What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"* We can assume that these people were quite sincere in their desire, but their question revealed a lack of understanding regarding our human relationship with God. That relationship is never based on our works. It cannot be, for God's law demands perfection of us—something we can never achieve. It is always based upon God's grace—that undeserved love bestowed upon us for Jesus' sake. Jesus, therefore, responded by pointing them to the necessary Spirit-wrought gift of faith. *"This is the work of God,"* Jesus said, *"that you believe in Him whom He sent."*

The people that day failed to understand and began showing some signs of resistance. They challenged Jesus, hoping they might get yet another meal: *"What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"* Jesus, however, did not rise to the bait. Rather, He said to them: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* Failing fully to understand and with stomachs growling they

responded eagerly: *“Lord, give us this bread always.”* Jesus then extended His one invitation: *“I am the bread of life.”*

My dear friends, it is natural for us, as it is for all human beings, to think in terms of work-righteousness. It is natural to think that if I am good and work hard to please God, then in view of my goodness and because of my hard work God will be pleased with me and bless me. Our relationship with God, however, is not based upon work-righteousness, and for that we can be eternally grateful. As mentioned previously, if we want to come to God on the basis of our good works, then we must understand that we must be perfect. Not a single sin can blot our record! Scripture says: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!”* (Romans 3:23) Scripture goes on to say: *“There is none righteous, no, not one!”* (Romans 3:10) Work righteousness is a delusion of Satan! The law has not been given to us as a means of salvation, but rather is intended to crush our desire to boast about ourselves and to show us our absolute need for a Savior!

It is only when the law has done its work within our hearts, and we recognize that we are powerless to save ourselves, that Jesus’ **one** invitation will prove meaningful to us. Jesus comes to us in our weakness and distress and assures us *“I AM the Bread of Life!”* Jesus alone saves. He is *“the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through (Him)”* (John 14:6). He cries out to us to come to Him in the midst of our labors and with anything that burdens us, and He promises to give us rest! (Matthew 11:28) **1 + 1 + 2 = 4-ever!**

III.

In our text Jesus offers us **one admonition, one invitation, and, finally, two encouragements!** Our text concludes with Jesus’ words: *“He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”* The people speaking to Jesus had been fed the previous day. They had come to find Him with the hope that He might feed them again that day. Had Jesus done so, and He surely could have if He so desired, their stomachs would have been filled for a few hours. Had their minds and hearts, however, remained the same—focused on the things of this life and believing that their own efforts were surely enough to please God and gain His favor, little would have been accomplished. Jesus encouraged the people before Him to come to Him not as a potential bread king, but as the One who could feed their soul and quench their spiritual thirst—not for a few hours, but forever (**4-ever!**)

Even so, Jesus encourages us today. He encourages us with that promise: *“He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst!”* The two verbs Jesus uses here are present participles, suggesting ongoing action—**He who keeps coming to Me shall never hunger; he who keeps believing in Me shall never thirst!** We keep coming to Jesus when our thoughts turn to Him, when our ears are open to Him, and when our prayers and praises are offered to Him. We keep coming to Him in private in our homes as we have personal and family devotions. We keep coming to Him in public in our worship services as we gather to hear His Word preached and as we use that Word to encourage one another in our Christian faith and life. We keep believing in Jesus as we confess our sins and rejoice in His forgiveness of those sins and promises of life everlasting. We keep believing in Jesus when we entrust ourselves, those whom we love, and all whom God loves to His care as the Head of the Church—our Savior and our Lord.

Are you hungry for personal peace? Are you hungry because guilt and shame have gnawed away at your sense of well-being? Are you thirsty for meaning and purpose in life? Are you left thirsty after drinking the polluted waters of our self-indulging and self-help culture? Come to Jesus! Do the “God-math” contained in these words from John 6...**one admonition + one invitation + two encouragements = a 4-ever** of never being hungry or thirsty again! Amen.

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

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