

Eat and Be Filled
August 10th, 2012

John 6:24-35
Pentecost 11 B

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<read text: John 6:24-35>

Our reading for today follows shortly after the gospel we read last week, the famous feeding of the five thousand. The other three gospels record the miracle for us and leave it at that. John, always the more unique read, records for us a long discourse that comes after between Jesus and the people he fed. We'll be reading through much of it in the coming weeks.

For now, what we read today happens about a day after that initial feeding. Since then, Jesus withdrew from the people because they wanted to make him king by force. He went up on a mountain alone. The disciples decided to get in their boat and cross the lake overnight. Partway through the night, Jesus walked out and joined them. Together the group arrived at the far shore. In the morning the crowds realized that Jesus had somehow slipped past them and went looking for him, crossing the lake themselves and starting the search in Capernaum.

Now up to this point this all seems pretty noble, right? I mean, when was the last time any of us so diligently pursued our Lord or went to such lengths to be with him? If only the crowds had just arrived in order to listen to Jesus. They hadn't. Jesus cuts right to the chase. He knows their hearts, he knows why they are pursuing him. They're hungry again. Jesus tells them, "You didn't come here because you love God, because you saw a wondrous sign and want to know more. You came because I fed you and now you just want more."

They had seen and experienced a miracle, a true gift from God. But their reaction was entirely in the wrong direction. Instead of marveling at the gift and letting it draw their eyes to the giver, instead of wanting to know more about who sent this gift and what it meant, their focus was on what was in their hands. The focus was on themselves. "Maybe there's more," was their reaction. The bread that Jesus gave them the day before was meant to show them that Jesus was someone special, to make them ask who this is and what he was doing here. In short it was meant to lift their gaze to God and the greater gifts he had to offer them, eternal life and the forgiveness of their sins.

Instead, they just thought about how they were hungry again.

Jesus is patient with them though. He still wants to give them the greater gifts. He confronts their attitude, tells them point-blank what is in their own hearts, and gives them both warning about this attitude and encouragement to change it. Don't be so concerned about this food that spoils, this food that only fills for a little while. God will feed you one way or the other. Instead you should look to the food that lasts forever, the food that fills you for eternity, food that the Son of Man can give you. This sounds great to the crowd, so they ask how can they get it? Jesus tells them, you don't *do* anything to get it, you just believe the one God sent (hint, hint).

You see that Jesus is trying to draw their attention to himself, first he drops the hint that the bread they need comes from the Son of Man then that they should believe someone God sent. Normally steering the conversation towards yourself is considered rude and selfish, but Jesus had what they truly needed to live, he was trying to get them to see and understand that. He was trying to point them to the greater gifts.

The people here, just...wow. Their reaction is completely wrong. First they ask Jesus for a miraculous sign so they can believe in him and *then* they drop a huge hint about the kind of sign they want. You know, Jesus, our forefathers were fed in the desert for forty years. Something like that, we'd probably believe in you. Do you see how manipulative they're being? They don't want to believe in Jesus, they just want more food! They need a sign? What about the meal they had yesterday?!

Again, Jesus is patient, far more patient than I could see myself being in the same place. He is trying to get them to look up, to look to him, and all they keep doing is looking down to the bread that was in their hands. But he tries again. He tells them this "manna" they are thinking of isn't real bread from heaven. Sure it was an earthly gift that God gave to the people at the time, but it's not what Jesus is trying to talk about. You want the one who comes down from heaven to give life to the world.

You can almost hear the thud as this bounces off their skulls. Well...give us that bread from now on! The bread we ate yesterday is gone and we're hungry again. Give us bread that will keep us full! Jesus tries one last time. He could not be more plain when he tells them, "**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.**" (v35).

Next week we'll get a chance to read the crowd's reaction to that bombshell, but for today our reading ends there. So far it's probably pretty tempting to side with Jesus in this discussion, right? As happens so often when we read scripture we just shake our heads in astonishment at just how slow these people are, how stubborn and narrow-minded they could be in their own ways. A miracle has happened! The whole point was to show them how much God loves them, how much

he wanted to give them something so much better than a meal! He had eternal blessings for them. But they just wouldn't look up. They kept focusing on their stomachs, on the food, on the temporary satisfaction.

But...do we really have a leg to stand on when it comes to judging this crowd? Naturally as sinful human beings, we don't have the right to sit in judgment on anyone else's sin. When we take the time, in love, to show each other our sins, we are only repeating God's judgment and only to help the person who's straying. That's different than the attitude we're tempted to have here, one of lording over these people, saying "I would *never* do that!" Even though which sin they've committed is immaterial, since in our own sins we have no reason to feel better about ourselves, we're still tempted to feel self-righteous when we are sure we wouldn't have fallen for that particular trap.

But even there, let's not get ahead of ourselves. God was trying to offer these people the greatest blessings, and they kept focusing on the immediate gifts, instead of the eternal they wanted the stuff that would fade and spoil and provide no lasting benefit. So what about you? Which do you want, the temporary or the eternal? As usual, sitting here, you're in the right frame of mind, you're thinking godly thoughts and so naturally you're saying to yourself "well, of course I want the eternal gifts." That's not really a fair assessment. Let's ask a different question. When are you content? When do you feel full and satisfied? What is it you pursue in your life to get to those feelings?

That might cut a little deeper, huh? Because I'd wager like me even, we all tend to chase earthly things to find those feelings. Being content and satisfied to us is the right combination of location or company or creature comforts. And even if we manage to mix those together in the right concoction for a while, they never last. And so we're always chasing after the next one. The next vacation, the next party, the next toy. And when we don't get it? When we can't have what we chase so doggedly after? Then we whine and complain and stamp our feet. When we don't get the earthly peace and comfort we think we deserve we turn to God either full of indignation or self-pity. Why me, God?

Why, indeed. Every good and gracious gift from God that we receive serves the same purpose; to remind us of how good and gracious our God is. God said exactly the same thing when he sent manna to the Israelites in the desert. It was so that they may know that the Lord is God. If that's not the lesson you're learning from your gifts, if you're not seeing the gift as a reason to look closer at the giver and his greater gifts more and more, well then you're not learning what God wants you to know. And if you're not learning that you're in pretty severe danger, God may have to try a different approach to get you to stop gazing at the gifts and start looking up to him, even if that means taking the gift out of your hands.

True and lasting satisfaction is found in the bread of life. Jesus. There's a much bigger problem than where our next meal will come from. And that's how we will face a holy God in our sinful state. We have neglected our God terribly, we deserve to be turned away when we come to him for help. But in his mercy God is as patient with us as he was with those crowds. He cares about us just as much. He loved you enough to die in your place. Eternity is what you should be concerned about and Jesus' death for you should motivate every moment of your life forward.

And don't get caught in that trap that says, "Well eternity is taken care of, now I can go back to paying attention to here and now." It doesn't work that way. Salvation is not a quantity you acquire, eternal life is not a box you unwrap. It is who you are now, and who we are in Christ puts the bread of him and his word ahead of everything because it feeds the eternal life. That's not to say we don't do our work here. God expect us to do that. But to a different end. Not to pile up food and money and treasures, but we do so in order to continue feeding on God's word, to continue growing in our lives for him. We do what we do for our Lord, not for this life. Stop scrambling after the earthly. Stop worrying about what you have or don't have, stop chasing what won't last. Instead, seek first the kingdom of God and God will provide you with daily bread on top of the eternal blessings he offers. The deeper your connection to God, the greater you will find real peace and contentment here regardless of your earthly circumstances.

The reason you are here, the reason you were not struck with judgment for your sin the moment you were born, was to give you time to be brought to faith in God. Everything in your life is orchestrated to that end, to bring you to and keep you in that faith so your eternal life can be preserved. Every earthly gift is designed to remind us of the goodness of God. Every need we have is to send us running to him for help. Don't let yourself be content with bread and a bed. Seek the real gifts that God has to offer you. Let everything that God sends your way be a sign that always directs your eyes heavenward. Look to the bread of life. There you can eat and be filled. Amen.