

“Who Is This Jesus?”

John 6:22-35

August 5, 2018

I'm sure most of us have heard the saying, “A cat has 9 lives.” But we all know that is not true, a cat has only one life. Only human beings have, or are meant to have, more than one life. God intends for us to have 2 lives – a physical life, characterized by breathing, think, and moving, which God gives to us through our parents; and a spiritual life, characterized by loving God with everything we have and loving our neighbors as ourselves. This spiritual life comes from God and He gives it to us through Baptism, Communion, and His Word. In God's plan we are all born physically and then we are to be born again – and this would be our spiritual birth. In John 3:5, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless this second birth, this spiritual birth occurs, a person cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Therefore, since we are designed for 2 kinds of life, physical and spiritual, logically then we need two kinds of food – bodily food and spiritual food. Now, I'm sure we can think of all kinds of different foods that are necessary for us to live – physically, but if you break it down to the bare essentials, what are the two things, the two forms of nourishment that we usually say our bodies need to survive? Bread and Water. Those are the basics, the two simple essentials we say our bodies need in order to live.

What's interesting then is that these are two words that Jesus used to describe Himself. To a woman at a well, whose spiritual life was dying, Jesus said, “I am living water, with me you will never be thirsty.” And today, in our Gospel lesson Jesus says to a large crowd of people, who had just eaten bread and fish, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” But if bread is one of the simple things we need to survive, why would Jesus use such a simple term to describe Himself? I mean calling yourself the “Bread of Life” sounds somewhat boring or uninspiring. It's almost like a candidate running for political office with a slogan, “Vote for Paul Thompson, he's a pretty good guy.” Considering that Jesus is the Savior of the world, that He is God in the flesh, that He lived a perfect life without sin and died to save us, why didn't Jesus say something like, “I am the filet mignon of life?” In other words, I am the best, there is no one better than me. Wouldn't that phrase get your attention? Why “bread?” Why did Jesus call Himself, “The bread of life?”

In Jesus' day, bread represented the major part of the meal, everything was built around it. Bread was also the very symbol of life. It was often used to symbolize spiritual blessings. In the Old Testament bread was placed every day in the Most Holy Place of the temple as a symbol of God's care for His people. Several stories in the Bible involved bread being used to care for people and to satisfy their physical needs; two in particular are referred to today in our Scripture readings. The first, from our Old Testament reading in Exodus, explains how God sent bread from heaven for the Israelites to provide for their physical hunger during their many years of wandering in the wilderness – a great example of how God cares for people even when they complain and fail to trust Him. The second story involves Jesus feeding the 5000 with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish; and our Gospel lesson for today is a continuation of that story. The point of these stories is that just as bread is essential for our physical life, Jesus is essential for our spiritual life.

But the people gathered around Jesus in our Gospel reading just don't get this; they missed the boat on this simple reality. Jesus had just left this crowd after miraculously feeding them with just a small amount of food. The people were so impressed that they followed Jesus in boats to the other side of the lake, not because of His teaching, but perhaps they were hoping that Jesus would continue to provide for them and maybe even make life easier for them. The problem, though, is that they were focused only on their physical needs, not their spiritual needs.

Isn't it amazing how much work we put into our physical needs and wants, like buying a car, a phone, or even a sofa? We research these things online, read product reviews, and look for the best price before we buy these items. Think how carefully you research the college you want to attend, the classes you want to take, and the financial aid options. We even agonize over what shoes to buy, but do we put that kind of effort into our spiritual wellbeing?

But maybe we don't have to put in a lot of effort. After all, Jesus did say in our Gospel lesson, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Like the bread that rained down from heaven in our Old Testament lesson, Jesus, the Son of God, came from heaven to

give himself on a cross to pay for our sins. So we devour Jesus, the Bread of Life, by trusting that He has dealt with our problem of sin. Eternal life with Him is very simple – just believe in Jesus as your Savior. Why, then do we need to keep “working” for this food? It’s because Satan is constantly trying to get us despise this Jesus, this Bread of Life, and treat Him as unimportant.

For example, you could say that Satan wants us to treat Jesus like the free breadsticks you get at the Olive Garden. Whenever you go to the Olive Garden, you love those breadsticks. They’re warm, you’re hungry, and you can’t get enough of them, so you ask for more. But then your main entrée arrives, and the breadsticks get pushed aside, practically forgotten, for something that now seems even more delicious. And many times at the end of the meal we don’t even think of those breadsticks, they’re not even put into a “to go” box, as they are taken away by the server.

I think we are often tempted to treat Jesus, the Bread of Life, the same way. We come to church to meet Jesus, but many times we fail to take Him home with us. We leave Him behind like those breadsticks. Not only do we need to feed on Jesus every Sunday, but we need to take Him home with us to continue feeding on His Word in order to nourish our souls. That’s why we offer several different opportunities for you to grow in your relationship with Him through Sunday School, Family Night, women’s circles, home Bible studies, and many others. And you will see and hear about all of these opportunities to grow spiritually and how you can get more involved in them at our Mission Fair on Sunday, August 26, between worship services.

In other words, when it comes to feeding our spiritual lives, think of it like raising children. Parents work hard to meet the physical needs of their children. They feed them, clothe them, and give them a place to sleep. But soon parents discover that the needs of their children go much deeper than simply providing for their physical nourishment. They want to be loved, encouraged, and held. They want to play. They hunger for knowledge and new experiences, not just mere existence. They also learn by watching us. Just imagine the impact you can make on your children and your neighbors when they see you taking the time to be here every Sunday, and to be with others during the week as you gather around Jesus, the Bread of Life, to study His Word to grow in your faith and to nourish your soul.

We are God’s children and while we think we need a lot of things: a home, a car, clothes, and food; in the end only one thing is needed for this life and the life to come – Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. So, as we have been fed His Word this morning, let’s reflect on our need for Him and the life we find in Him as we prepare to nourish our souls again here in the Lord’s Supper; and let’s make sure we take Him with us wherever we go this week.