

August 1, 2021
Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

“The Good Food”

John 6:22-35

I’ve got two large, aging dogs. Guinness is a black lab mix. Ginny is a German Shepherd mix. They’re much the same in that they’re good dogs; very well behaved, obedient, happy and loving. But they’re very different when it comes to dinner time. Ginny, though skinny as a rail, often just nibbles at her food and then refuses to eat. Guinness, he eats all of his food rather quickly and afterward is willing to eat Ginny’s food, Bridgette’s food and my food too! The thing is that Ginny is willing to come over and eat our food too—the stuff that’s not all that good for her—but the stuff that’s in her bowl that has the nutrition she needs? Nah. She wants nothing to do with it.

That’s kind of what the folks dealing with Jesus in our Gospel lesson are doing. Jesus had the day prior done the miraculous feeding of the 5000. Some of the crowd who were fed now track Jesus down in Capernaum, that’s kind of Jesus’ home base, and Jesus knows what’s on their minds.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” And then Jesus explains that the loaves and signs aren’t all that important, but believing in the One the Father has sent is food that endures to eternal life.

But here is where the crowd is like my dog Ginny: *“Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”* They’re not interested in the bread Jesus is talking about! They don’t want to eat that! They want Jesus to do more of the bread signs; want Him to be a new Moses making loaves, loaves and more loaves. They’re basically saying, “Forget the faith and food enduring to eternal life. Do it again! Do it again! The loaves and full tummy thing!”

The spiritual food that nourishes unto eternal life, they turn their nose up at it. The earthly tasty stuff that does nothing for them spiritually, that’s what they want.

I wonder how many in that crowd came to accept and believe Jesus’ true words of grace to them: *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”*

Now in one way I’m kind of preaching to the choir here. You are gathered in these pews or tuned in on Facebook to receive Christ, the bread of life, as He comes to you in Word and Sacrament. You are living out your faith and seeking the food that endures to eternal life. This morning I hope you’re all like Guinness, joyfully gobbling up all the Gospel you can as your gracious Savior pours it out upon you in buckets! If you’ve got folks in your orbit at home who aren’t in the habit of worship, you might try bragging about how much grace you got to feast on here. Maybe they’ll get jealous and change their ways. It sure works on my dogs.

But on the other hand, what you do here on Sundays and what you do away from here the other six days of the week may be a completely different story.

The Christian church for many decades now, and I’m talking in all denominations across the board, suffers from a really bad case of biblical illiteracy. People don’t know what’s in the Bible because people aren’t reading their Bibles. If you ask a random group of Christians what the Babylonian Captivity was all about you’ll likely get a bunch of blank stares and then somebody will mumble, “It was not a good thing, right?”

My fear is that many folks, including folks here today, are eating like Guinness on Sunday but Ginny the rest of the week. We're all in for the gift of grace this first day of the week, but the other six days we're focused on the worldly treats that do nothing for eternal life. And I'm not talking about sin. Yes, of course we sin and you're in the right place where forgiveness is formally poured out—spoken, touched and tasted! It's wonderful.

But Jesus is the bread of life and Jesus is the Word made flesh. His Word is what is good for you and let's face it, what we read in church on Sunday is just snippets of the larger books. Often they're completely void of context. Yes, it's good to hear and yes, I try to flush out some main truths and foci in my 10-to-15-minute sermon. But Holy Scripture is meant to be read in large chunks, quietly pondered and reflected upon, fully digested for the building up of faith in a world that's trying to tear faith down.

This issue has been on my mind for a number of reasons lately, but it really was punctuated this past Tuesday when I was reading my devotions from C.F.W. Walther, the first president of our synod, and these scary words jumped out at me: "A person may stand for a time in a great zeal for godliness, and the bright light of a saving knowledge may burn in him, but if he becomes lazy in using Scripture, neglecting to read it or hear it for weeks and even months, his zeal will grow cold and the old darkness will again cover his soul. If he then ceases to associate with the Bible, he is bound to experience a complete fall from divine grace."

The terrifying idea of falling into such darkness should bring to mind a familiar verse of Psalm 119: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" Why is this true? Because the Word reveals Jesus, your Savior. The Word is Jesus, your Savior. And let's face it, you know I'm right about this. I could easily start quoting a litany of chapters and verses to back me up on this. But I don't need to.

Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*" Do you think He meant for you only to eat such bread on Sundays?

Don't be like Ginny when it comes to feasting on the Word of God, thinking that the stuff of the world is more appetizing. By that I mean doing what you know we so easily do—making every other task, duty and distraction a greater priority than the Word, and thus there just never seems to be the right time to settle down and receive the food that endures to eternal life. Don't starve yourself. Make time.

The sad thing is that I'm betting a lot of you hearing this message are receiving it as law—"Man, Pastor Rich is really guilting me up about Bible study." Seriously? That's like the hour-old baby saying, "Oh man, here comes that breast again!" Hey, that's biblical. St. Peter says, "*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*" You find that milk in your Bible!

This is the grace of Christ! It all points to Jesus and the forgiveness that abounds from His life, death and resurrection. If you need to, change your attitude. It's not, "I've got to read my Bible." It's "I get to eat me some grace, so forgiveness, some peace, some Jesus."

Don't be the silly people who had Jesus right there in front of them, but the only thing they desired was more and more earthly loaves. Sure, they're nice, but you still die. In the pages of Holy Scripture read, studied and proclaimed is Jesus the Savior and His accomplished sure promises for you. Dig in and keep eating. Never hunger. Never thirst. Just keep believing and receiving the Jesus therein—the food enduring to eternal life.

Amen.