

August 4, 2024
Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Terms and Conditions”

John 6:22-35

People generally seek their own self-interest and want to do things on their own terms. I don't think anybody would argue against this; it's just how we are. This is why we easily accept Jesus' words later in John's Gospel, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*" That is sacrificial love because that is to give up all self-interest and set no terms, you just die for the sake of another.

This core tendency is on full display with this crowd who tracks Jesus down the day after He fed the 5000. They are really interested, maybe not so much in Jesus, but in what He just did for their bellies. Bear in mind that famine, hunger and starvation is a real issue in first-century Israel, always has been. They'd like more of this miraculous feeding thing. It's in their own self-interest to find Jesus. Jesus knows this.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."

Jesus' point is that these folks didn't see the sign, the miraculous feeding, and then believe He was the Messianic Son of God and put their faith in Him. They just want to be fed more food. But Jesus continues, "*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.*"

Jesus offers them more than temporarily filled bellies. He points to Himself as the one from God who offers eternal life. The people are interested. Eternal life is in their own self-interest. But immediately they want to know the terms. "*What must we do, to be doing the works of God?*"

The Jews think the Torah, the law of Moses, is the bread of life and they like it that way. They want to know how much they must do to obtain God's favor so they can get that much done and are free to live the rest of their lives on their own terms. But Jesus points to faith, which is an all-of-your-life type of thing devoid of one's own terms. "*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*"

Then there is this bit of interplay where the crowd is still pretty focused on Moses and the manna that God provided through him. They still seemed focused on the world, looking for further signs from Jesus. But they do want this bread from God Jesus speaks of. Jesus then makes things much more clear: "*I AM the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*"

This conversation will continue over the next couple of Sundays, but this opening section really does show a couple of ways we should examine ourselves and how we receive Jesus, the bread of life.

The first has to do with looking to our own self-interest. I'm not necessarily talking about selfishness and self-centered sin here. I'm talking about the natural instinct to seek out that which is best for ourselves. What is that for you?

Like the crowd in our reading, we regularly are enamored with the full belly of the here and now. What is it that gives us that sense of well-being? A high-paying job or a lot of cash in the retirement account? A stable family and a legacy to pass on to them? A standing among your peers; people who look favorably upon you? A generally healthy body? Such things are in our

own self-interest, but when we trust in these above all else they become our “bread of life”. But whatever the bread of this world is, the truth is that it is a short, temporary thing that passes away. Only Christ lasts forever.

I’m assuming y’all get that because you’re here in church. We know it is in our eternal self-interest to follow Christ. This is a good thing and thanks be to the Holy Spirit for revealing this truth to us. But we still struggle with wanting to receive Christ on our own terms.

“*What must we do, to be doing the works of God?*” A Christian can be asking that same question, wanting to tick off that box so one doesn’t have to worry about Jesus in the rest of one’s life. Do you do the Jesus thing Sunday morning but nary a prayer is spoken the rest of the week? When you do say your prayers in the morning, are you just finished and moving on? Or do you go forth intent on living the day as God’s servant to His glory? At work or school are you seeking to serve Him, or are you expressly serving your own interests and ambition? What I’m getting at is do you separate off the “works of God” parts of your life from the rest of it—from YOUR life, where you set your own terms?

“*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*” Following Christ isn’t something that can be compartmentalized; it isn’t a “sometimes, depending on the situation” thing. Life in Jesus is an all-of-you type of thing...as Jesus will go on to make very clear in giving all of Himself on His cross to save us.

This certainly does not mean we Christians must give up our entire sense of self-interest. It does mean that as we go through our day we strive to do every single bit of it in trust and faith in Christ, in service to Him. “*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.*” These are very instructive words from Jesus. We can do our work in this life in two ways. We can work for the sake of this life; making our goal and highest priority the comforts, pleasures and peace available here. Or, we can work toward the promised salvation that is in the process of coming to completion of the Last Day. These can look very much the same, doing life here in the world providing for yourself and those you love. But one of these lives of work comes to an end; one does not. One serves self; the other serves the Savior. One is the bread of death; the other is Jesus, the bread of life received by faith.

So, in your own self-interest, examine your life with an eye toward anyplace you may be trying to set terms with Jesus, where the work of living out your faith seems not to hold any sway. The work of faith is that you believe in the One God has sent, and there are no terms to be set, no limits. Jesus is Lord; Lord of you, Lord of all. Jesus is the bread of life, and choosing a different diet is poison to faith. Moreover, it is the height of utter stupidity!

“*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall **not** hunger, and whoever believes in me shall **never** thirst.*” The terms Jesus offers are blissful and eternal, far beyond anything this broken world can offer. Choosing to draw back from Jesus because you love something of this world so much that you don’t want Him to hold sway over it is like refusing entrance into heaven itself because there is a no-smoking policy. You are choosing that which kills over and against eternal life in paradise!

Wake up every morning and know that Jesus is the bread of life; He is your life; and leaving all your sins of yesterday behind you by His forgiveness, do everything of your day in faith, believing in the One whom the Father has sent, knowing that whatever terms He sets for you are wonderful, because His greatest interest is always your salvation.

Amen.