

The Bread That Endures

John 6:27-29, 35

When we hear the word bread we usually think of the stuff we buy from the supermarket or hot bake shop. But the word bread can also be used to describe the whole array of material needs we have such as food and clothing and income. If someone were to offer us free bread we would find that offer very attractive.



Jesus in our text for today offers us bread. He tells us not to work for the bread that perishes but to strive instead for the bread that endures, for the bread that he gives.

Jesus promises that with the bread that he offers, we will never hunger or thirst again.

Much of our life is spent in the getting of bread. We work hard to support ourselves and our families. We try hard to build up a few assets and accumulate a few possessions to make our lives more comfortable. When we are young it may be buying those things that we need for daily living and to furnish a house. As we get older we continue to work hard to set up our children in life — we like to give them the best educational opportunities we can. Later we plan carefully for retirement, planning our superannuation carefully so that we might be able to live comfortably. Even when we are old we feel we have to watch the dollars and cents carefully so that we can live comfortably. For the whole of our life just about we are involved in getting bread, and yet none of what we do lasts very long. Our lifetime is brief and what we accumulate in the way of possessions we cannot take with us when we die. What we leave behind when we die is soon forgotten. Nothing of the material bread that we strive for endures for very long.

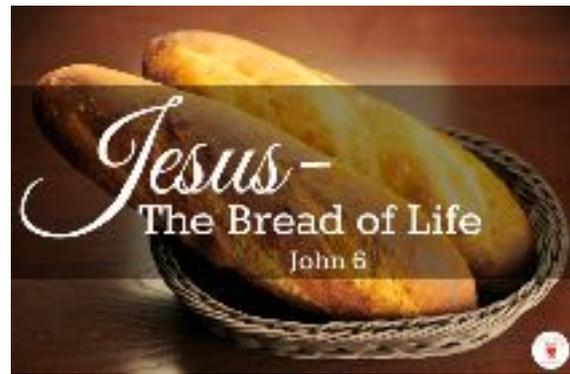


Now if that were our only hope in life, to know that what we are and what we strive for is soon forgotten when we die, then life would be pretty hopeless, and we would soon want to give up in despair. But there is something better. Jesus tells us he has bread that can satisfy our hunger so that we won't hunger again, ie. he can permanently satisfy all our needs.

Apart from the material needs of food, clothing, and housing, we need to feel wanted; we need to be loved. We need comfort and encouragement when we are sad; we need assurance when we are afraid. Above all we need forgiveness.

All these needs are met in Jesus who calls himself the bread of life. Every time we come to worship and hear his Word, every time we receive his body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion, every time we read his word, every time we allow God to speak his precious word to us through the words of a fellow Christian, we are fed on that bread.

- It's this bread that can cure the doubts and the worries that sometimes overtake us.
- It's this bread that can give us hope and confidence to face the problems of each day.
- It's this bread that can remove feelings of guilt and restore broken relationships with others.
- This is the bread that can bridge generation gaps, and heal broken marriages and strengthen faltering ones.
- This is the bread that can bring harmony between disputing parties.



- In this bread lies the answer to the hopelessness and despondency and pessimism of so many people in the world. What we need, and what our society needs, is not slick social programmes or new political theories — they don't give the peace and unity that everyone yearns for. But instead we need to hear again and again the good news of Christ's forgiving love. Christ alone can give the peace and the security that everyone longs for through the bread that he offers. In fact he himself is the bread — "I am the bread of life" he says in our text. He gives himself to us in his Word, and in a very tangible way through the Sacrament of Holy Communion where we literally partake of him who is the bread of life.

Christ has the answer to all our needs. He gives us that answer — we don't have to earn it or work for it. Jesus told his hearers, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (v27) His hearers thought they had to do something to gain this bread. "What must we do to perform the works God?" they asked. And Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (v29) Believe in Jesus is what we must do. It's not just a matter of performing certain good deeds, or keeping a set of regulations. It's believing — believing that Jesus is the one sent by God, that he is himself the bread of life who can sustain us in every aspect of our life.



The people in today's Gospel reading were not convinced of this. They asked Jesus for a miraculous sign to prove to them that he really was God's appointed one who could give bread from God himself. And this was only the day after they had witnessed Jesus' miracle of feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. They mentioned Moses in the O.T. and pointed out how he gave

bread to the people on their wilderness journey from Egypt to the promised land. Surely Jesus was not greater than Moses is the question that ran through their minds. Jesus didn't grant them a sign, he didn't have to. It wasn't Moses who gave the bread in the wilderness, but God who gave it through Moses. So also now, it is God who gives the bread from heaven through his son Jesus.

"What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?" the people asked Jesus. There are people just like them today who ask for signs, who say for example, if only Jesus would become visible, or if only he would stop all the suffering in the world, then we would believe. But Jesus doesn't need to prove himself. The fact that he is the Son of God who can meet all our

needs is written about in the NT. That's all the proof we need. At the beginning of John's gospel Jesus is called THE WORD. At his baptism he received the Father's seal of approval with the words, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased" and by the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. Here in our text Jesus himself claims that divine approval when he says about himself as the Son of Man, "It is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Jesus has the seal of approval from God the Father.

We buy goods at a store with confidence when they are guaranteed by a reputable manufacturer. Jesus is guaranteed by God himself as being the authentic Son of God, the authentic Word, the final revelation of the Father's will. That is all the proof we need. He IS the bread of life who can meet all our needs.

The bread that Jesus offers is the bread we should be striving for, because this is the bread that endures to eternal life. All the other bread that we can so easily devote all our energies to perishes. Even those things that are essential like food and clothing and shelter don't remain forever. Therefore Jesus warns us not to get carried away by the pursuit of these. Of course we need to work to gain an income and plan for the future and manage our finances carefully. But always we must remember that this is the food that perishes, and none of this is as important as the food Jesus offers that endures. His is the food that endures for eternity and can carry us through this life and on through death into the life to come. Why go hungry when the table is always set for this food? It's always offered to us. Let's take up the offer each day and eat of this food. Amen.

