

John 6:22-35

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for this morning and what will be our starting point for the Gospel and sermons for the next few weeks is John's Gospel, "Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 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." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?"

Food is a very important part of life. It is an important part of the life that we have as a congregation here. Whether we are on a diet, a regimented meal plan, or just the see food diet, of seeing food and eating it, we all need to eat. We even refer to the importance of work in food analogies, speaking of someone “bringing home the bacon” or “putting food on the table.” And someone who can make sure that we always have enough food is going to be highly sought after.

This helps to set the scene for our text today, because this teaching of Jesus that we will be looking at for the next few weeks is happening on the heels of Jesus’ miracle of feeding the five thousand. Of course, Jesus rightly is able to see and ascertain the motivation for the crowd that followed him, as it had been necessary to slip away the previous day lest the people force him to become king. He knew that the people wanted him

to be king because they saw in him a man who would provide for their earthly needs of food freely and easily.

Of course, this is something that people have always looked for; someone who will give them what they want. Politicians promise to do this all the time, with very little lasting success. Indeed, Jesus tells the people that they are barking up the wrong tree by trying to make him king because he can provide them bread. Rather, he points them to something more. He points them not to what he can do, but to himself.

But how does the crowd respond? They want something more. They ask what sign he performs that they should believe him, even while their bellies are still digesting his last sign! And while this may amaze us, that this crowd was so short sighted and had no regard for what Jesus had already done, we ought not be too amazed. After all, we all suffer the very same affliction.

This kind of “what have you done for me lately” attitude is alive and well amongst God’s people today. When things go wrong, we are quick to question God’s love for us. When we are hurting we are quick to disregard the promises of God’s providing care. We think that those things were what we heard during the good times, the times of peace. Times of crisis are different, we tell ourselves and others. In times of crisis, we need to have something new. We need to have a new sign to trust that God is with us. All that same old same old just won’t cut it anymore. We need a new word from him to know that he loves us. We need a new experience to trust that everything is going to be ok. And so, as we struggle to find our footing to pray, as we sit in our hospital bed, or as we cry out to the heavens, we demand the same thing as Jesus heard from that crowd so long ago; what sign does Jesus do that we should believe him?

And the answer to us is the same as Jesus' answer to the crowd long ago. "Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." We look to the bread of God for our hope. We look to the bread of God for our strength. When we are looking for the bread of God, we rightly understand that this bread is something more than a nice crusty piece of ciabatta bread. The bread of God is not a fresh piece of flatbread. The bread of God is not a French baguette. The bread of God is not even the best kind of whole wheat bread. The bread of God is something far more than food. It is nothing less than our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

So the question of what sign he gives that we might believe him is right there in front of us every single week. We look to the cross. We look to the very instrument of the torturous death

of the Son of God as our sign. We call to mind the fact that Jesus Christ went to the cross willingly in your place and mine. He suffered the beatings, the shame, the pain, and the death that came on the cross so that you would be spared Hell itself. This is the sign that you have been given, the very blood of God spilled upon the ground that he created that you and I might live.

But of course, maybe you're thinking to yourself; dying is easy. Anyone can die. Lots of people have done it. What makes Jesus' dying so special? Because we know that he didn't stay dead! He rose again as the first fruit of the resurrection. He is alive even today, and he is our Lord even today. And it is through his death and resurrection that we have assurance of our forgiveness and salvation. This truth is the very Gospel that the Church has been tasked to preach throughout the world and has indeed done so for almost two thousand years.

Of course, when we hit our times of crisis, this truth can begin to slip further away from us. When we are in duress, that is when the devil comes and attacks us. When we are already weak, that is when Satan desires to steal the hope of the Gospel from us. But thanks be to God that he has given us another sign, something that we can receive often for the strengthening of our faith and resolve in the face of the attacks of the evil one. He has given us the bread of his very body and the wine of his own blood.

He has given us this wonderful Sacrament that we may have a constant source of strength and comfort. We are fed with this gift often, as it is right for us to do. So when the hard times come, as they inevitably do, we have something to turn to. We turn to our Lord Jesus Christ who comes to us again and again through his body and blood that he gives to us. This is why it is so important for us to actually recognize the presence of Christ.

He gives us real peace because of his real presence. He doesn't give us merely the representation of forgiveness or a metaphorical strength. He gives us the real goods because of his real presence that is here, among us in the Sacrament of the Altar.

It is for this reason that in the Small Catechism Luther answers the question of "What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?" with the following: "These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

What's more, this proper understanding and appreciation of the gift of the leads us now to say along with the crowd, "Give us this bread always." It is good for us to desire this gift often, weekly even. And our God, who is faithful and loving and

giving provides us this very bread. Further, we receive the blessings and benefits of this Sacrament because of the faith that we have received. We are able to do the work of God that Jesus speaks of in our text, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” Through the work of the Spirit, God gives us the very thing he requires and desires us to have and to do.

This belief in Jesus is something more than simply believing that he existed. It is more than recognizing the intellectual and historical facts and realities of who he is. Belief in Jesus, the belief that he is speaking of in our text, is trusting in him. It is turning to him when things are at their darkest. It is about knowing that our salvation is in Christ that that no one can snatch us from his hand, no matter how many attacks or attempts the devil might make on us.

This bread that we receive that imparts to us all of these wonderful blessings is given to those who seek it. It is given to those who recognize the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament and those who are united together in doctrine and belief. It is a blessed meal that we rejoice in being able to join together as brothers and sisters in Christ to receive so that we may never have to ask what sign Jesus performs that we might believe him because it is itself a sign that points us back to the greatest of his signs, his own death and resurrection for our forgiveness and life. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting. Amen.