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Pentecost 11 – John 6:24-40 – Jesus, God’s True Bread King
8/4-8/21 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

I saw a quote some time ago that maybe some of you have seen too. It goes like this: “Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for, in order to get to a job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car, and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it.” I couldn’t help but laugh a little bit when I first saw it. They say good humor is an acceptance of reality, and that definitely captures it. But yet, for me this wasn’t laugh-out-loud kind of funny. It struck me as more of a sad kind of funny, because the word that just keeps coming to my mind is *futility*.

I mean, isn’t that so true of our lives? We’re like ants driving to work when the sun comes up and driving back from work when the sun goes down, too often totally wearing ourselves out doing something we have to so that we have no energy anymore to enjoy doing the things we want to. And for what? If life is mostly just toil and trouble on a slow march toward death – as it certainly is for sinful people in this sinful world – then what hope do we have of changing it?

Left to ourselves, none. And yet that doesn’t stop us from still trying. There must be hope somewhere, our heads tell us so. And so we look and search and beg to find it. But all along our hearts pine for something more, something deeper than our minds can see and grasp – it’s something that our Lord Jesus has been holding out to us and wanting to give us all along. Not just our daily bread that keeps a roof over our heads, the lights on, and our stomachs full. But the bread of *life*. See, Jesus gives us food that doesn’t spoil and he sustains our lives into eternity. Yes, Jesus is a Bread King, but not an earthly one. No, he’s so much greater. Jesus is a *spiritual* king; he’s God’s true Bread King, who provides for our souls the richest of fare that will endure to eternal life.

But who could blame the Jews for thinking more about earthly things? What a spectacle it was that Jesus put on the day before! 5,000 men plus women and children gathered around him to hear him speak. He

spoke with such authority and the people were so enthralled that before they even knew it, they were out in the middle of nowhere on a mountainside with nothing to eat, and it was starting to get late. They had been so focused on Jesus that they had almost totally forgotten about themselves, but then their minds snapped back to reality. What were they going to do? Well, as they milled around like sheep without a shepherd, Jesus gave them their answer. He sat them down, prayed over a few small loaves and fish, and by a miracle unlike anything they had ever seen or expected, he managed to feed and satisfy every single one of them, with more left over in the end than when he started in the first place.

Well no surprise, everyone was in awe. “This Jesus speaks with the authority of God, and he does things only God can do. Who is this?” Their heads were spinning, and all they knew was that they didn’t want Jesus to leave. They didn’t want to lose him, they *needed* him. But by the next day when the crowds caught up with Jesus again, their sentiments had really just turned to selfishness. They didn’t really want what Jesus truly came to give. All they knew was that their stomachs were growling again, so they turned their eyes away from Jesus as Savior and just wanted to take advantage of his power as Provider. To them, it’s like Jesus wasn’t much more than that vending machine you can shake a few extra free candy bars out of.

But you can be sure that Jesus saw right through that charade. “*I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.*”

You know, we New Testament Christians can have a tendency to be pretty hard on these Jews for the way they spoke and acted back in the time of Jesus. It seems like all they care about is themselves and the here and now, and maybe that’s true. But is that really so different from us today? I’ll tell you, as many times as the Jews put their feet in their mouths spiritually, I’ve heard plenty of people nowadays say things like, “You gotta be good so God will be happy with you,” or “I’m better than the guy next to me, it just doesn’t seem right that we

should both be able to go to heaven just the same,” or “I’m sure God understands that I’ve got too much on my plate and too many other things going on to make it to church,” and the list goes on. Sometimes that tendency all sinful people have to focus on ourselves and the things we do just blurts out before our better judgment can stop it. And I think this was one of those times for the Jews. They wanted to keep the good times rolling and they wanted God to approve of them too, so they asked Jesus, “*What must we do to do the works God requires?*” If Jesus really was nothing more than a vending machine to them, they at least were willing to put in a few coins to get the goods, so to speak. So they said, “Okay, what do you really want from us? What do we have to do to make God happy with us? If we scratch his back, he’ll scratch ours, right?” They just didn’t get that Jesus wasn’t there to give them an opportunity to earn something from him. He was there to give them a free gift of God’s grace – something so much more and so much better than anything they could ever earn on their own.

So Jesus answered, “*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.*” The work of God is this. Does that strike you as a peculiar way to say that? You might expect Jesus to respond, “What God requires of you is to stop thinking only about yourselves and believe in me!” But instead he says to them, “*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.*” By putting it that way, Jesus takes the focus away from them and puts it where it should be – on God and on the Savior that he sent into this world. See, the grace Jesus offered them is so perfect and complete that even the work that God requires for salvation, Jesus says, isn’t a work that we ourselves can muster. *No, our eternal salvation isn’t a work of ours, it is the work of God for us!* It is a free gift from God who works in us that faith that clings to Jesus, that connects us to all of his spiritual blessings, that *believes* and trusts in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, and that sees in him God’s true Bread King who feeds our souls to eternal life.

It was a spiritual feast that Jesus set before his people right then, and with believing hearts, now he calls us, too, to come and hear: “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty... All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away... For*

my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

It’s as if Jesus looks into each one of our hearts and says, “Dear child, I know your hurts, I know the emptiness you feel inside, I know your needs and your wants, I know the things you hunger for in this world, and I know how you long to be filled. But whatever you need, whatever you want, whatever you yearn for, I want you to know that I AM. I am the one who gratifies your every desire and longing. I am the one who meets your every need. I am the one who fulfills all your hopes. I AM the Bread of Life who fills not just your stomachs but your souls, and who sustains you not just to face today but to reach eternity. You belong to me, you are my very own most treasured possession, and I will never leave you or forsake you or ever let you go. Trust in me, and I will satisfy your deepest cravings for forgiveness and salvation, because I laid down my life to make sure of it. The *things* of this world come and go. The *people* of this world come and go. But you are always before me, and though earthly food can never keep you from going down to the grave, the spiritual food I offer in Holy Scripture, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion will even bring you back up out of it one day and give you life to the full – life with me that is imperishable, immortal, and eternal.”

My friends, there’s no *futility* in those words. There’s so much more than just a meaningless craving to fill our stomachs. These are the very words of life that come to all believers of all times and places from God’s true Bread King, our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is what he uses to bring us *soaring high* above this sinful world with all its dangers and temptations that can drag us down, and ultimately toward his perfect world to come up there in heaven. Jesus is our pilot, and his Word is the wind in our sail! In God’s precious Gospel message, he gives us food that will never spoil and he sustains our lives into eternity. So at his loving invitation, come, enjoy an extra helping of his grace, have your fill of his blood-bought forgiveness, drink deeply from the cup of his free salvation, and through faith in Jesus Christ, indulge in the Bread of Life, which sustains our bodies and our souls both now and forevermore. Amen.