

## Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

**Sermon Text:** John 6: 24-35

**Theme:** “*Bread for Life*”

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

As Jesus walked the earth, proclaiming the good news concerning the kingdom of God which had come to humanity, people consistently missed the significance of who Jesus was and the blessings he brought for all people. So often people wanted Jesus to perform the spectacular miracles but they missed the simple truth that he was heralding in not a better life in this world, but the perfect life that is given in unity with the Triune God.

Listen once more to Jesus’ words to the crowds gathered when Jesus fed the 5,000. “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 labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (Jn 6:26-27).

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

### **God gives his people daily bread**

In last week’s New Testament reading, Paul was leading us in a prayer for spiritual strength. Paul wanted you to be strengthened from the inside out. “May God grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:16-21)

In today’s Old Testament reading God gives us a wonderful example of his providing for the daily needs of his people in a time and place that seems impossible. God, working through Moses, had led his people out of Egypt where they had been suffering under the hand of Pharaoh. Flushed with the joy and success of their escape, the Israelites soon realised they had been led into the wilderness where it seemed as though there was no food, certainly not enough to sustain a nation of people on the move. They turned their anger to Moses and Aaron and complained that they would have been better staying in Egypt to die with food in their bellies than dying hungry in the wilderness.

We are sometimes quick to ridicule the Israelites for not trusting more in God, but how would we have reacted to such a dire predicament? Whenever I take my family camping for a few days or even a few weeks, I usually take more than I need, just in case we get caught in a place longer than expected. Here all the Israelites were wandering around, not knowing *how* long they would be in the desert and without any provisions to sustain them. Surely they were right to complain?

God heard their complaints and he told Moses that he would provide bread from heaven for you. Now God would provide this heavenly bread, but the people were to gather only enough to meet their needs for one day. This was in order to test the people to see if they would trust God to continue providing for their needs, each and every day. It’s hard to imagine what it would have been like, the first morning the Israelites rose to be greeted with this strange flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. No wonder they asked Moses, “What is it?” Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat”. God provided miraculous bread from heaven to sustain his people during their long march through the wilderness.

### **Jesus Christ – Our daily bread**

Well, just as God provided for the needs of the Israelites so they could endure the long march ahead of them, so God continues to provide the sustenance for our lives, whether they be long or short. God provides for our physical needs. Luther writes in his Small Catechism, “[God the Father] also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home... He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.”

Perhaps a little like the Israelites of old, we may be quick to grumble about our lot in life. Things may not be going according to your plan. You may not have the things in life you expect you should have. Perhaps you are being burdened by things you don’t think are very fair. Friends, whether things are good with you, or you are facing great difficulty, continue trusting in God to provide you with the things you *need* each day.

Now in John's gospel we hear Jesus speaking to the great crowd which has gathered to hear him speak. Remember that this is the crowd of 5,000 men plus the women and children, which had been fed by the miraculous division of five loaves and two fish. The crowd was hungry for a leader who would satisfy their wishes, one who would give them what they wanted. Jesus tells them that they are looking for him, not because of the signs, but because they were given a spectacular feed. The people missed the signs. This is significant because the fact that Jesus was able to feed them should have alerted them to the history of God providing for his people food from heaven. That Jesus was also able to provide this miraculous food should have told the people that here was God, in their very midst.

Jesus wants to the people to turn their attention from daily food that perishes and seek and work for the food that endures to eternal life. This then gives the people a focus – work. What is the work they must do to be doing the work of God? We'll come back to that question shortly.

The people are still puzzling over Jesus' words so they ask him for a sign that they might know and believe that Jesus is truly from God. Do you see the foolishness of this? Hasn't Jesus just feed all these people on a few scraps of food? What more of a sign do they want? The people then remember that God fed his people with manna in the wilderness. Jesus uses the history of Israel to point to himself. "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (v33). They hungrily ask Jesus to give this bread to them always. Jesus then said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (v35).

So here we have the good news. Just as God provided for the Israelites by giving them manna from heaven, so God continues to provide for his people by giving us his Son, Jesus Christ who is the living, true bread from heaven. With God's heavenly bread you are given the strength to sustain you during the good times and the struggles in your lives. Now unfortunately this doesn't mean that things will always be good in your lives. I think this is where so many Christians struggle in their faith. Those who are spiritually immature expect that because they put some faith in Jesus, everything should be right in their lives. Well just as the Israelites still had to wander for many years through the wilderness, so we have to wander through our lives - lives that are often filled with both good and bad times. Whether your lives are now filled with happiness or with challenge, God continues to provide the blessing of his heavenly bread to sustain you on your journey.

### **Our work – is to believe**

I want to return briefly to the work of Christians. Remember that Jesus said, "Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you (v27). Here we have a puzzle. We are to work for food, even the blessing of eternal food. And yet Jesus also tells us that he himself will give this eternal food to us. Why work for something that is already going to be given to you? And this is the key to Christian work. In the first instance, being a Christian isn't about doing something, it is about believing in someone, that someone being Jesus Christ who is the bread from heaven.

This is your work in order that you might be called among God's saints, here on earth or in heaven when our earthly life draws to its close. But now as Christians you bear the fruit that is fitting for those who put their trust in God. You serve those around you; you care for those who are suffering ill health or injury; you fight for those who are oppressed and endangered. You shine the light of Christ which is the sign for a weary world that God has not left us alone, but that he continues to love us and provide for our daily needs.

Believe that Jesus Christ is who he says he is – God's true bread from heaven. Receive this true bread through the gift Jesus gives to the church, his Holy Communion through which we are strengthened with bread for life. Shine Jesus' light so the world may see and know that the Lord is good.

Paul's prayer has been answered. You have been strengthened with God's true, heavenly bread so that Christ dwells in your hearts through faith.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.