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St. John Lutheran Church  
Waverly, Iowa  
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**“The Bread Of Life”**

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 14,

**(In church, announce that we’ll use The Gospel Lesson without reading it again.)**

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to Him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the village and buy themselves some food.’

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’

‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered.

Jesus said, “Bring them to me.” Then He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about 5,000 men – not counting women and children.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Bread is the ‘food of affliction’. It’s Genesis 3 food – after the fall into sin. Before the ‘Fall’, Adam and Eve ate fruits and nuts. Nothing had to die for man to live. But after sin – after Adam and Eve reached out their hands to take a food that was not given to them and blessed by God – after that, mankind now had to live off of the bread of affliction. Genesis 3, “***By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your bread...until you return to the ground...for dust you are, and to dust you will return.***” Ever since man’s fall into sin, God is now giving us life in, and through, death – the death of plants, the death of animals, and finally – and most importantly – the death of His Son, Jesus, THE BREAD OF LIFE.

Bread has always meant ‘food’, sustenance, one of the staples of life in a fallen world. The Israelites ate manna in the wilderness; and it sustained them on their journey to the Promised Land. And yet, that bread, that manna, wasn’t powerful enough to give them life after death. Jesus said in John 6, “***Your forefathers ate manna in the wilderness, and yet, they died. But here is the bread, which a person may eat and not die. I am THE BREAD which came down from heaven, which a person may eat and never die.***”

The fact that Jesus teaches us to pray: “***Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread***”, shows us that our daily bread, our physical needs, are not unimportant to Jesus. However, God does not simply give us our daily bread because He’s concerned about our cholesterol, or He wants to ‘hone’ His chef skills. NO! He gives us our ‘Daily Bread’ in order to preserve and protect our lives, so that He can then save our lives, through faith in Jesus, for all eternity.

So what’s our problem? Our problem is that we’re often more concerned about our daily bread, than we are about “***The Bread of Life, which a person may eat and not die.***” Our sin is that we often say to ourselves, “*First, I need to get my bank account in order, my work done, put food on the table, a new car in the garage, a new TV, a new game system, a nice house, a new wardrobe in the closet, and then I’ll have time to come to church and be fed by God.*”

But that's the 'upside down' way of doing things. It's the way of little faith. It's majoring in the minors, and minoring in the majors. Years ago, when the late John D. Rockefeller died, one of the news reporters asked his accountant, "So how much did Mr. Rockefeller leave behind?" And his accountant answered, "All of it!" To want our "Daily Bread", without Jesus, is sinful materialism. We make our bread-baskets more important than "***The Bread of Heaven, which a person may eat and not die.***"

One of my greatest disappointments as a pastor is when I see parents raising kids who are "fat on the things of this world", but are actually "skinny Christians"; because the parents are putting their children on a self-imposed diet or rationing of God's Word. (Well, we don't want to go to church too often, or we might actually believe it—wouldn't want that.) And I want to be very honest - most of the time, the fault lies with the dads. If the dads will just be leaders, and insist "our family will worship", 99% of the time, the moms and kids will follow. I have great empathy for the moms, who bring their kids to worship alone, while the dads are out playing.

In our Gospel lesson, we're told: "***a great multitude followed Jesus (in the Greek it literally says 'chased after Him') because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased***". John 6 adds, "***They followed Him because they ate the loaves and had their fill.***" In other words, you can also follow Jesus for the wrong reasons. Many were chasing after Jesus simply because they wanted their stomachs filled, their pockets lined, their diseases healed, and their houses stuffed.

But Jesus has come to give us more than we're asking for, and much more than we deserve. Talk about Wonder Bread, Jesus says in John 6, "***I am The Bread from Heaven, which a person may eat and never die.***" Our sin is that we treat this Bread of Life, Jesus, as He comes to us in His Word and sacraments, as if it's just plain, ordinary, crusty, day-old, reduced price bread that's here today, and stale tomorrow. We treat the Bread of Life, like that bread the waiter tosses on your table, as an excuse to eat butter, to keep you busy while you're studying the menu. We treat The Bread of Life as if He's no more important to us than a sesame seed envelope for two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce cheese, pickles, onions, on a sesame seed bun. In other words, we treat Jesus as: nothing all that spectacular. **Page 3**

‘But Pastor we’re just so busy, and Sundays are our only time to sleep in and relax.’ Perhaps the solution is to alter your diet, and rather than eliminating “*the Bread of Life which a person may eat and never die,*” reduce the ‘fat intake’ of some of the other delicacies of our lives, that our clogging our hearts, and choking out Jesus. Parents, if you always make sure that your children are doing everything at school, everything in sports, and everything in the community, but have no time for Jesus, you’re actually putting them on a junk food diet spiritually; and if all those other things in their lives manage to cut off the blood supply of Jesus’ forgiving blood, that cleanses our sinful hearts, spiritually they’ll die of heart failure; just like a person who physically lives on a “junk food” diet, runs the risk of dying of a stroke or heart attack.

Jesus said, “*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*”

Our text says, “*As evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Lord, this is a remote place, and it’s getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages, and get some food.’ Jesus said, ‘They don’t need to go away. You give them something to eat.’ They said, ‘But we only have five loaves of bread, and two fish.’*”

The disciples knew the ‘sensible thing’ to do – send the people to the local eateries. But Jesus – for Whom nothing is impossible – is not restricted by “the sensible thing to do”. He says, “*You give them something to eat!*” You can almost imagine the disciples thinking: “*Let’s see. Five loaves and two fish divided by 5000 men – not counting women and children – why, they won’t even get to lick the fish.*”

But again, Jesus, for Whom nothing is impossible, is going to use their need for bread, to give them “*The Bread of Life*”. Jesus invites these sheep without a shepherd to sit down on the grass. Sound familiar? ‘*He makes me lie down in green pastures.*’ They’re also sitting down next to the sea. “*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*” So get ready, because you know what’s coming: “*He restoreth my soul!*” is about to happen.

They answered, “***But we only have five loaves of bread and two fish.***” Sounds alot like Voters’ meeting, doesn’t it? Those kinds of words are often times the way of little faith, when it comes to Jesus.

Jesus said, “***Bring them to Me!***” ***Then, taking the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to Heaven, He gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples (ie. sounds like the Lord’s Supper. We’re getting to that). The disciples gave the food to the people. They all ate, and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up 12 baskets full of broken pieces...and the number of those who ate was about 5000 men (not counting women and children),***” probably 20,000 people.

I want everyone to see something here. According to John, it was a little boy who gave Jesus the five loaves and two fish. It was probably that little boy’s sack lunch. If we will but render our gifts to Jesus, like that little boy did, look how Jesus can ‘explode our gifts’ – whatever they are – to feed the world not only with bread, but with the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. And the Lord will bless us too as we render our gifts. Can you imagine how God could explode your gifts to bless our preschool, so that we use it as an outreach arm to bring un-churched families into St. John. Can you imagine how God could explode your gifts to start a chapel in Ghana, Africa; or get the catechism into the hands of Cambodians and Chinese? Can you imagine how God could explode your gifts to start a mission church in Charles City? Can you imagine how this miracle must have touched that little boy? I let Him use my sack lunch, and he fed over 20,000 people mommy and daddy; “***now I know that Jesus is the Bread of Life from heaven, we’ve been looking for.***” He may never have known that, if he refused to let Jesus use His sack lunch. How about us?

Why did Jesus do this miracle? So people would never be hungry? NO! Because He’s a ‘health food’ nut, and wants us to eat a healthier diet? NO! Because He didn’t want the people going to Long John Silvers? NO! Jesus wanted this light to shine in their hearts: “***Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Green pastures! Still Waters! Food where there was none! Setting a table before us! All of us restored! Our families sitting around Jesus eating bread, just like our fore-fathers sat around the tabernacle where God was, eating manna. He’s the Messiah! The Shepherd of Israel! THE Bread of Life, we’ve been waiting for!***” **Page 5**

In Joshua 5, we're told that when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, and started eating the food of the Promised Land, that the 'Manna from Heaven' stopped! Now we don't know exactly where they got this, but the faithful rabbi's believed that when the Messiah came, He would pour out Bread from heaven again. As Jesus multiplies the bread and the fishes, He's all but shouting to the people, who are stuck on their stomachs, "*The Savior of the world is standing in front of you!*" That's what He said in John 6, "*Your forefathers ate Manna in the wilderness, and they died. But here is the bread which a person may eat and not die. I am the Bread which a come down from heaven, which a person may eat and never die.*"

Just as Jesus exploded that little boy's sack lunch and fed all those people; at the cross, the loaf of Jesus' body was broken to pieces, and baked in the oven of God's wrath, and His crucified body is enough to feed the whole world of starving sinners with forgiveness. There's enough Jesus there for you too!

Just as those disciple said that Jesus can't take five loaves of bread, and two fish, and turn it into enough food to feed 20,000 people; but He did it! Be careful that you don't tell Jesus He can't take bread and wine, and explode it to be His body and blood, and feed the whole world with His forgiveness. If you do, you're making your brain bigger than the Bible; and He'll prove you wrong every time.

In fact, it wasn't long after this miracle, that Jesus took some more bread, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said: "*Take and eat! This is my body, which is broken for you. Take and drink! This cup is my blood, which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.*" It too is a miraculous meal. Don't believe in one miracle, and then deny the other. But in this meal He is "restoring our souls" with the medicine of immortality. This is the bread, Jesus says, that "*a person may eat, and never die.*" In the Lord's Supper, Jesus is feeding the 5000 again in an infinitely greater way! Right before we go to communion we pray in the Lord's prayer '*Give us this day our daily bread!*', and God's altar becomes a dinner table for baptized believers, who are repentant of their sins and hungering for forgiveness; and no matter how hungry you may be physically, at this table Jesus "*restores our souls.*"

In closing, this Bread of Life, Jesus Christ – unlike your daily slice of Wonder Bread – comes with an unconditional guarantee to the eater: “***And I will raise Him up on the last day.***” This BREAD OF LIFE gives, what no other bread can give – a way to die and not stay dead. How can we be so sure? Because this Living Loaf, this true Wonder Bread, checked back out of His grave alive on Easter morning; and in the Lord’s Supper we take this Risen Bread of Life, Who cannot die again, into ourselves.

This Bread of Life – Jesus – is so incredibly good, that He says, “***Whoever eats this bread will live forever.***” We should be camped outside of the church doors every Sunday, waiting for this nutrient-rich meal of forgiveness. We should be using our sack-lunches - whatever that may be - to make sure this Bread of Life gets to people everywhere. We should be inviting our friends, even more than we would to Red Lobster or the Olive Garden; for every other food we eat becomes a part of our dying flesh, and goes with us to the grave. But in this meal, the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, goes into us, and makes our dying flesh a part of His living body, so we get out of our graves alive.

The bottom line is this, folks: if you fill up your life with the desserts of this world, you’ll have no room or desire for the Bread of Life. Who wants bread after they’ve eaten dessert? And while it is true that there are no statistics to show that those who commune frequently live longer or healthier lives – for that you might try Vitamin C – nevertheless, THE BREAD OF LIFE, Christ’s flesh and blood, do altar the outcome of our death. Jesus said, “***Here is the bread which a person may eat and never die.***” The ancient church called the Lord’s Supper: “*The antidote by which we die not*”! In this miraculous meal, we are taking into ourselves, and becoming one with Him ‘***who swallowed up death forever***”. That is why the early Christians said that in this supper we receive “*the medicine of immortality, and the sacred remedy by which we conquer death, and live in Christ forevermore.*” So reprioritize your diet, and “***Taste and see that the Lord is good!***” AMEN!