

“BREAD THAT SATISFIES FOREVER”

John 6:35-51

Today could be a very big day for someone here (from an earthly perspective, that is). You see, I'm holding in my hand a check for 253 Billion dollars. I assure you it's a real check bearing my signature drawn on my local credit union account. All you have to do is fill in your name on the “pay to the order of” line. I'm about to gift this to some fortunate individual this morning and it's a gift that many only dream of. With 253 billion dollars in your account, you could be a billion dollars richer than the richest man in the world—Elon Musk who has only a meager 252 billion dollars. So here goes. The offer is good for the first individual who comes forward and claims it and the offer is good for the next 10 seconds only... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... I'm sorry the offer has expired. You snooze, you lose!

Was nobody interested in being the richest man or woman in the world? Why no takers? Had someone claimed it, do you think they'd try to cash it? Not likely, because we all know that most pastors are not well off. And even if I weren't, my net worth most certainly does not exceed that of Elon Musk. I could write all the checks in the world, give all the promises in the world, but I couldn't deliver on them, could I? You know with certainty that this check for 253 billion dollars isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

Well that's how the Jews heard Jesus. In the Gospel today they heard Jesus say, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Yeah, right! There's a lot of people in the world Jesus. And you're saying whoever comes to you, which means all who come to you, even if it's the whole world. You'll feed them. You'll care for them. You, one of the poorest people in this city. You're just going to write a check for 253 billion denarii and make it happen? They would be more likely to trust in an Elon Musk than in Jesus Himself.

And then Jesus says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” Again, yeah right, Jesus! You're not only going to give life now, but eternal life, also? Who do you think you are? Moses died, Abraham died, the prophets died—your own father (Joseph) died! But you came down from heaven, eh? Not from Nazareth, not from Joseph and Mary. And you say you can give the life of heaven. Really? Well Jesus, your ego's writing checks your body can't cash.

Except He could. You want proof? Look at the SIGNS! Not only having just fed the five thousand, but the healings, the exorcisms, the power over nature. He was consistently being challenged, and He constantly met every one. His teaching amazed all who heard Him. And now He was doing it again. Amazing and challenging words. Words the likes of which had never been spoken before. No wonder they had trouble understanding!

We do too! Let's be honest. When what Jesus says challenges what we think... when His truth is so different from what the world say is true, when He promises what seems impossible, when He says things like He did today, about being the living bread from heaven, about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, we can struggle with that, too. Our sinful nature pushes back... doubts... and wonders... and some Christians flat out deny what He said here. It can't be true.

So Jesus got push back that day in Capernaum. And by the end of the day, all but the twelve, it seems, left shaking their heads. It can't be true. It just can't be.

They knew hunger... and thirst. They knew life and death—the realities of life. How could these NOT be? They knew Jesus. They knew His parents. How could He say He came down from heaven? How could He claim God as His Father? And then when they saw Him die on the cross, see? He can't give life. He can't even save His own life.

And then He did! The Jews were right, it would have meant nothing—if Jesus hadn't risen to life from the dead. That empty tomb and the living body and blood of Jesus makes all the difference in the world. What He promises—even life after death—He can deliver. And He will deliver. “Whoever comes to Him will never hunger. Whoever believes in Him HAS (present tense) eternal life.” The manna in the wilderness and the bread and fish that fed the five thousand merely sustained life until death. But the bread of Jesus, the bread from heaven, sustains life through death and to life again.

So if you want life, don't go to Moses or anyone else. Don't go to the Law or to anyone who says: here is the list of things you have to do to have eternal life—even if that list is short. The life you need, only Jesus can give.

So “come to Me”, Jesus says. We come in faith when we repent, when we read and hear His Word, when we bring our children to be baptized, when we come to feast on His Body and drink His Blood. And that's good.

What's not good is when we also turn away from Him. When in our weird, sinful, spiritual schizophrenia, we come to Him and turn to Him one moment, and then turn away from Him the next. When we pray “Our Father” on Sunday mornings and then act like orphans who have no father the rest of the week. When we turn to other things we think will give us life, or the kind of life we think we want or need. When we're swayed away from God's truth by what the world says. And consider this: It's not just when we're NOT afraid to sin (when we freely and boldly sin and shove it in God's face), but when we are afraid NOT to sin. Let me repeat that: not just when we're NOT afraid to sin, and turn away from Jesus, but when we're afraid NOT to sin. Because that happens too. When we're afraid that if I don't sin, if I don't do this thing, if I don't go along, I'll lose friends, I'll lose this thing I want, I will lose this life I've worked so hard to achieve.

So you sin, because you're afraid not to. You sin, because you think your life is in your hands, and forget—or doubt—the promises of Jesus. So you sin, and what do you get? This kind of life is like the hurdles in the Olympic track competition that maybe you've seen this week if you've been watching the games from Paris... except that there is no end to the race and always another hurdle to clear. So you kept your friends... until the next thing they want you to join them in. You got that thing you wanted... until the next one comes along. You cleared that hurdle and then you see there's another... And another... And another... Always another, until you wear out, fall down, or die. That's what sin is. That's what sin does. It keeps moving the bar, setting up another hurdle, demanding more.

And likewise, with Moses and the Law that the Jews kept looking to to save them—there's no end to that race. There's always another sacrifice. Always more good works to do. Always more prayers to pray. Always striving to have a stronger faith... always striving but never arriving. There's no finish line. Because the finish line for eternal life is perfection. And you can't reach that. You've already dropped that baton and been disqualified.

But that first Easter morning—that was Jesus clearing the final hurdle—the hurdle of death and finishing the race. A race He didn't need to run, but which He came and ran for us, to get us to the finish line, too. With Him. Therefore the life you need He has for you. So come to ME, Jesus says. Rely on ME. Believe in ME.

And even though sin will always remain part of the Christian's flesh and life, Jesus sees to it that it doesn't harm us. Though we stumble, He forgives. Though we turn away from Him, He doesn't turn away from us. Though we die, yet shall we live. That is His promise—His gift. He is that kind of bread—that can give that kind of life.

That's why Jesus said: "Whoever comes to me I will not cast out." It's why He DIDN'T say: "Whoever doesn't sin I will not cast out..." He's greater than that. He came for sinners. And wants sinners to come to Him. The Jews wanted Him to cast out the sinners. They were offended when He hung out with them and ate with them. But He insisted. Because He would NOT cast out any who came to Him. This is why He came. For sinners. For us! He came to forgive and give life.

That's His promise. The danger of sin is that turning to it we turn away from Christ. Little by little, turning to sin more and more, and turning to Christ less and less. Drifting away, being seduced, believing falsehood, until we've cast ourselves out of the kingdom.

"Come to me", Jesus says. I'll give you this bread from heaven. I'll speak it in your ears. I'll pour it on your heads. I'll put it in your mouths. As often as you come. It will never run out. When you're thirsty, I'll give you drink. When you're hungry, I'll feed you. When you're dying, I'll give you life.

These are spiritual truths, yet they spill over into our earthly lives also. You can't divide the two. What you believe affects what you hunger and thirst for in this world and life—where you go, what you do, and where you look. To hear Jesus' words and think only of this world and life—like the Jews who heard Jesus so often did; like so many today so often do, even us, at times—is trying to fit the square peg of Jesus into the round hole of this world. He's concerned for us in this life, yes, but so much more.

So that day in the wilderness, He fed them. But He wanted to feed them so much more. He wanted to feed them with Himself. So He uses this miracle, John says, as a SIGN pointing to something even greater. So He catechizes them with the true bread, in the true life, in their true Savior. That we eat and not die, but live forever... that we find life and food and drink and forgiveness and hope in Him. Because He came from heaven with all these gifts, and say: FOR YOU.

So come to me, Jesus said. And you did! You came. You came with your sins, with your fear, with your failures, with all the times you turned away and fell on your face this week, with your weakness, with your doubts, with your troubles, with your brokenness, with your troubled marriage, with your strained friendships, with your disobedience, with all the hurdles you knocked over this week, with your questions about the future, with your worries about your children, with your worries about yourself, with your dissatisfaction, with your confusion, and with everything else you carried in here with you today... hungering and thirsting for something more, something better, something you need that you just can't get, or do, or achieve.

And you've come to the right place! Here is the bread of life. The bread you need for the life you need. Feed on His forgiveness. Feed on His Word. Feed on His promises. Feed on His Body and Blood. And leave knowing that whatever you came in here with stays here and dies here... with Jesus. And you leave with His life and freedom. And that's a check you can take to the bank! Because "whoever comes to me I will never cast out." And so it really is true, what Jesus said. And it really is true, what we sang in the Introit: "O, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" In the Name of Jesus, Amen.