

12th Sunday after Pentecost
August 11, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 6:24-35 (EHV)

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

²⁶Jesus answered them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸So they said to him, “What should we do to carry out the works of God?”

²⁹Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent.”

³⁰Then they asked him, “So what miraculous sign are you going to do, that we may see it and believe you? What miraculous sign are you going to perform? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³²Jesus said to them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴“Sir,” they said to him, “give us this bread all the time!”

³⁵“I am the Bread of Life,” Jesus told them. “The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Allow me to present you with a candidate for the highest office in the land. This candidate is a wonderful public speaker. He genuinely cares for all people equally – rich and poor, men and women, old and young. This candidate has a great economic record, ensuring that people have food to eat at a price they can afford. His record on healthcare is without compare as he is responsible for restoring the health of many with various diseases. He is a teacher and a great promoter of life long learning. Although his enemies throw mud at him, none of it sticks because he is an upright man before God and before man. He is calm in the face of any storm, disaster or threat. He commands the most powerful armies in existence. He is kind, merciful and compassionate. He is, of course, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But he is not actually a candidate for any political office.

Think of how great life would be with Jesus as mayor or governor or president. That is what the people in John 6 were thinking. The Bread of Life discourse that we will consider this Sunday and the next two weeks, is the day after Jesus fed the five thousand, walked on water, and healed many people. The people knew that Jesus could improve their economic status, their health, their political power, their safety and they were learning from him too. They were willing to find Jesus wherever he went because Jesus would make their life better.

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

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Jesus knows their motivation for finding him. They got free bread. They were looking for earthly food and earthly prosperity and not for what Jesus was primarily sent by his Father to give. We live in one of the most, if not the most, prosperous nations in the history of the world. We have more food, more money, more technological advances, more cars, more of almost everything earthly than any other nation in the world. Whether it is in a place where we have so much earthly stuff or in a place where people are truly living in poverty, the version of Jesus people seek is often the Jesus who is going to make my life better now. This leads to the crass lies of the false teachers who promise great riches for giving to their ministries.

But it also leads to the misleading messages like: If you follow these 10 biblical principles for money, you will be wealthy. If you follow these 7 rules for relationships, your children will be wonderful, you will have great friends and your marriage will never see a bad day. If you just obey God, your life on earth will get better and better.

These kinds of messages that are proclaimed by teachers in the Christian sphere are misleading because that is our way of thinking by nature. The people asked Jesus, *“What should we do to carry out the works of God?”* Just give me a plan to get God to bless my life so I can be healthy, wealthy and wise. We all have some of this way of thinking. This is misleading also because it is partially true.

The 4th Commandment includes such a promise. Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth. It is a general truth that if you honor your parents, life will be better. It is a general truth that if you obey God in other areas of life, those areas of life will go better. But God makes no absolute promises that if you do things his way, your earthly life will be better. You might be the hardest worker with the most honesty and integrity and get passed by for promotion by the lazy coworker who is friends with the boss. You might take care of the body the Lord gave you by eating well and exercising and end up with a terrible disease. You might do your best to live according to the Bible as a spouse, a parent, a child, yet still face big challenges in these family relationships.

And if you believe the misleading message that Jesus will give you a better life if you do the works of God, you are going to have big spiritual problems. For that means that either you failed or Jesus failed. You will look for reasons to blame yourself for not obeying Jesus. You may think your faith was not strong enough. You may begin to doubt if you have any faith in Jesus at all when life doesn't get better. Or you might blame Jesus. You might begin to think that Jesus can't or won't help make your life better. You might think he was a liar.

It might be worse if you are succeeding in life. Then you think everything is fine between you and God. After all, my health and wealth and good life show that God is happy with me. When we believe Jesus is supposed to make earthly life better, we are set up for despair or self righteousness. Both take us from the true version of Jesus, the Jesus who reveals himself to the crowd in John 6.

²⁶Jesus answered them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Jesus is giving something much better than free meals. Jesus is giving something much better than the manna God provided six days a week for forty years in the wilderness. Jesus came to give food that endures to eternal life. When we want Jesus to help us with our earthly life, it is like asking Jesus to help us scrounge for a few French fries that fell under the seat of the car last week when he has promised us a feast of steak and lobster. Would we say, “No thanks, Jesus, this week old fry will be just fine?” Of course not. Jesus promises all people an unending feast in

heaven. But how do we get eternal life?

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²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent."

No twelve step program to receive eternal life. No program of obedience. No being good enough, healthy enough, wealthy enough. No earthly conditions at all. Believe in the one he sent. That's it. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Believe that Jesus came from the Father to live the perfect life before God for you, not to get a good earthly life, but to give you eternal life. For Jesus' life was not one of earthly success. He only lived three decades. He was beaten and whipped, nailed to a cross and crucified as a violent criminal. All this he did to take away our sin and guilt. All this he did to give us eternal life. What do we need to do to receive this gift of eternal life? Believe in the one sent by the Father. Believe in Jesus.

Jesus certainly helped make the earthly lives of many people better. His miracles fed thousands, healed many, and protected others from the forces of nature and of the devil. But his greatest act did not make the earthly lives of believers any better. His death and resurrection were followed by a time of great persecution of any who believed he was sent by God the Father. They fled their homes, were kicked out of their synagogues, and some were arrested and executed too. But it did not matter what their earthly life looked like. They have been given the promise of something far better by the Son of God who lived and died for them.

We have the same promise of eternal life from the same Savior. This will cause our way of living to change as we give thanks with godly living. However, our economic status, health, relationships, and the rest of this earthly life may or may not change for the better. That's fine with us too. We have a Savior who gave all for us whatever our earthly situation. We have what the Bread of Life came to give – eternal life. Believe in the one who gives you this promise:

"I am the Bread of Life," Jesus told them. "The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Amen.