

John 6:30-33 (Tenth Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 13—Series B)

“Don’t Forget the Giver”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

August 1, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is from the Gospel lesson for the day recorded in John 6:

³⁰Therefore, they said to [Jesus], “What sign do you do so that we may see and believe you? What work? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it stands written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³²Therefore Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, Moses has not given you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the Bread of God is [the bread] which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

It’s been said that “an elephant never forgets.” Elephants might not forget, but I sure do. If I don’t write it down, I’m so much less likely to remember. And as I’ve said before, don’t tell me anything I have to remember as you walk out of church on a Sunday morning because I’m probably not going to remember it.

The crowd at the feeding of the 5000 was forgetful too. When they found Jesus on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, they wanted to know when He had gotten there. “You didn’t get into the boat with the disciples, so when did you sneak out? And by the way, can you feed us again?” They weren’t looking for Jesus because they saw the miracle of the feeding and were putting their trust in Him as God and Lord but because they ate their fill of the loaves and were satisfied. Jesus knew that and told them so as He directed them to a spiritual food that endures for eternal life, not just physical, earthly life. And the crowd then asked for a sign if they are to believe in the name of the One whom God the Father had sent, namely this Jesus. You see, that had already forgotten about the five loaves and two fish which Jesus used to feed more than 5000 people.

The crowd wasn't thinking of the sign of the miraculous feeding as pointing them to Jesus, God-made-flesh and dwelling among them. They were thinking of their physical need for bread. After all, they tried to force Jesus to become king so that He would provide for their physical needs every day. No more working for food for this bunch! "Besides," they said, "our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness that Moses gave them. Moses took care of our peoples' physical needs. Why won't you? Give us more bread!"

It became all about the gift—the loaves—and forgotten in all of it was the Giver. The fact that Jesus fed all those people in the wilderness with a few loaves and fish should have been received as a sign pointing to Him as Lord and God. Who could do such a sign if He were not true God? But the crowd couldn't see past their noses—or more accurately, their stomachs. It was all about what they got and not about from whom they received it. If Jesus had gorged them with food and drink every day, He would have been a welcome Christ. But when they asked, "What must we do to be working the works of God?" and He told them, "Believe in Me!" they wanted to know why? "What sign do you do that we should believe in you? Moses gave us bread from heaven. What are you going to do?"

Martin Luther, preaching on John 6, told the people of his day, "I suppose people will always be willing to let the Gospel feed them and make them wealthy, to have it serve worldly ends and bring them food, money, honor, and life's comforts; but it is intolerable if it tries to instruct people in the service of God. They love God as lice love a [vagrant]; far from being interested in his welfare, their one concern is to feed on him and suck his blood. Our

love for the Gospel is like that. We seek nothing but gluttony and our own selfish interest. The Gospel is loved on account of greed, not on account of righteousness."¹

Pretty strong words, aren't they? But how often are Jesus and His Word received for what can be gotten from Him for this life? "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people" (*Small Catechism*). So, what will you give me, Lord? What earthly blessings can I expect from you? What sign will you do that I should believe in You? Will you always give me what I want—food, clothes, nice house, nice car, lots of money, happiness, health? Are you going to make this life worth my while? Let's see the gifts! Let's see the blessings pile up! You want my love? Well show me!

It becomes all about the gifts. It becomes all about the physical, earthly prosperity that God can give. And if He really loves us, that's what He'll do. Fill my basement and my shed. Give me grain and give me bread. Be for us the "bread king" so we don't have to work so hard for it anymore. Moses did it for the Israelites. Why won't You do it for me, Jesus?

Actually, Moses didn't give the Israelites anything. The people had forgotten. God was the giver of the manna in the wilderness. You know the Biblical account. We heard it again today in our Old Testament lesson from Exodus 16. "The people had nothing to eat and resentfully deplored their departure from Egypt with its fleshpots and its onions and garlic. They forgot the servitude they had endured there. They panted after Egypt and forgot the miracles of God. In answer to Moses' plea God gave them manna; each day the people gathered their daily ration. . . . They collected it daily from the fields in quantities sufficient

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 23 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 30.

for the day, bore it home, and prepared it as they chose. This miracle endured for forty consecutive years, providing these wicked, ungrateful Israelites with daily food. But they wearied of this bread from heaven and would fain have returned to Egypt with its onions and garlic."² And yet, even as they complained, God gave. He gave and gave and gave. Not Moses! God, the Lord Yahweh, gave. And Moses told the children of Israel, "You shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:2–3 ESV).

And it was from the mouth of the Lord that the people in Capernaum heard that it's not all about the gifts. It's about the Giver. Jesus, true God and true Man said, "Truly, truly I say to you, Moses has not given you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the Bread of God is [the bread] which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Manna didn't give eternal life. It only sustained earthly life. As Jesus Himself would point out a few verses later, "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died." This crowd ate the loaves and one day, they would die. But God is giving a gift better than the manna. He's giving a gift better than a life-time supply of food. Jesus, gesturing to Himself, said, "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may

² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 23 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 30–31.

eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:49–51 ESV).

The bread that God gives is His own Son. Jesus is the Bread come down from heaven. He is the Gift of God to all people. He is God the Father's gift given into death as the Paschal Lamb in order to give life. "For the Bread of God is [the bread] which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jesus gives you life by His death. He dies for you sins so that you now live in His righteousness. He suffers God's wrath and anger; He bleeds on the cross. You have peace with God and receive pure, white garments washed in the blood of the Lamb, symbols of your holiness and rightness. He wears thorns on His head. You wear the crown of everlasting life because your sins are forgiven, removed, atoned for. You have life and have it in abundance—eternally with God.

The Bread of God, Jesus Christ, has removed your sin. He has delivered you from the power of death and the devil. By the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit, you believe in Jesus whom the Father sent to live, suffer, die, and rise again for your forgiveness and for your eternal life. The Bread from heaven, Jesus, is the real gift. He is the Living Savior and God the Father is the real Giver of all the spiritual blessings of His Son, our Lord. These gifts you receive by faith through the Gospel, in Baptism, and in the Blessed Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood where He feeds us with bread and wine, that is, His true Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins, for eternal life, and for salvation.

In addition, the Lord also provides that which we need to support this body and life. He gives good gifts to us in food and drink, house and home. He blesses us with what we need

and enables us to share with those who lack. But it's not about these gifts. It's about the Giver. It's about the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. Everything else flows from this blessing of eternal life and salvation.

As we learned from the *Small Catechism*, the Father does all this "only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him." To the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we do give thanks and praise for the Bread of Life, Jesus, and for our daily bread that we receive from the Lord's abundance and blessing. Amen.