**God Feeds His People**

**John 6:1-15 & Ex. 16:2-21**

Laetare – Lent 4 – 0319.2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Did you hear what happened to the Israelites? They were in the wilderness, their trust in God failed, and they grumbled. They thought they were grumbling against Moses, that he was the one that brought them out of Egypt. It was however not Moses, but God brought them up out of Egypt.

Who was it that brought the 10 plagues upon the Egyptians? Moses may have been the instrument used, but it was God who had performed the miracles.

While it was Moses who held out his hand over the Red Sea, it was God who parted the waters. God made them stand up on either side as they walked through on dry land. God brought them crashing down upon the Egyptian army, and saving the Israelites. It is why they sing a song of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord after Pharoah and all His host are drowned.

It is the 15th day of the second month after their departure for Egypt, and they grumble against the Lord that they are hungry. God’s plan is to care for them, so God gives them quail to eat at night, gives them bread every morning. They are to pick up the manna each morning, but only enough for the day. They are commanded not to keep any of it overnight. God provides, but do they listen? Do they trust?

Some keep mana into a second day. It develops worms and stinks terribly. God told them what to do, but they did not trust God.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus, seeing that a large crowd was coming toward Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”

Jesus is testing Philip. They knew what Jesus had done and had seen the miracles; water to wine, His driving out of the temple the moneychangers and those who sold, His healing the of the official’s son healed, the miraculous healing at the pool of Bethesda. They had heard Him speak about His relationship with the Father who had sent Him. Did Philip trust Christ? His response makes it plainly evident that he was a bit confused yet. He answered Him, “Two hundred denarii[a] worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.”

Yes, the disciples had seen and heard Jesus, you would think one of them would get it. They didn’t! Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”

“Look at the crowd Jesus, there's 5,000 of them! The corner bar doesn't have enough stocked to feed that many for Friday fish fry. There is no way five barley loaves and two fish can do it?”

Jesus did not berate them or get angry at them because of their lack of faith. Although they should have also remembered their history, what we just heard from Exodus where God first gave manna to the people of Israel in the wilderness. Jesus simply said, “Have the people sit down.”

Then Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples to distribute to the crowd. He then did the same with the fish – as much as they wanted. And when all had eaten their fill, Jesus instructed them to gather the leftover fragments – they took up 12 baskets full.

When everybody saw this, they proclaimed that the prophet had finally come into the world. They declared Jesus a prophet, one who has God with Him, but who was not Himself God. They did want to make Him king though! Take a little bit of food and multiply it to overabundance? If He could do this every day, provide them with all this food? Woohoo! What a king He would be!

We know this because after the events in our text, Jesus went over the sea to Capernaum. And the next day the people came to find Him. Finding Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “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 work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on Him God the Father has set His seal.” (Jn. 6:26-27)

What food endures to eternal life? The bacon, eggs, hash browns, toast, and strawberries you had for breakfast were great – in fact, you probably shouldn't have eaten all that. But you will eat again today, at a good estimate, probably two more times. Why because you will get hungry again.

Too often our texts for a given Sunday are smaller portions of Scripture. It is good to sometimes get the broader picture. So, as Paul Harvey used to say, “And now, the rest of the story!”

Continuing in the sixth chapter of John, Jesus continues to make what appear to be some outrageous claims. What was the manna the Israelites ate in the wilderness? “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven for the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (vv. 32-33) Jesus is saying that He is the true bread from heaven.

That didn’t go over very well, so John records for us. So the Jews grumbled about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” (vs. 41) They of course talk about Jesus’ parents, “He’s just that one carpenter’s son! Who does He think He is? How can He make this claim that He came down from heaven? What is He trying to say?”

Jesus gives them an answer, but it is an answer that they did not like. In fact, it is an answer that many who claim to be Christians today do not like.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may 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.”

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (vv. 47-52)

Today it sounds like this: “It isn’t really His body and His blood. It symbolizes His body – it symbolizes His blood. It is simply bread and wine. This is just the meal where we gather together and remember Jesus. It doesn’t give forgiveness of sins – it is just a small wafer and a sip of wine. And it certainly doesn’t grant salvation or eternal life.”

Jesus answers your unbelief if we only but continue to read. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” (vv. 53-59)

Many today respond. “But that makes no sense! I can see the bread! I can taste the bread! I can see the wine! I taste wine. Besides, Jesus is in heaven, He cannot be here and there at the same time, that’s scientifically impossible!”

You are not the first ones to have a hard time with this. When many of His disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (vv. 60-6)

Moses, did you bring us out here to die? There is no food, we are dying of hunger?

“Pastor, you don’t truly believe that Jesus truly gives us His flesh to eat or His blood to drink? You genuflect after you have recited Christ’s Word in regard to the bread and then in regard to the wine, claiming that you do so because Christ flesh and blood, as true God, is now sacramentally united to the bread and wine? You are seriously superstitious. How ridiculous is that?”

Yeah, I get it! I can understand how you feel about this. It is truly unbelievable! It is incredibly remarkable! But only if it is true! To make such claims – are the ramblings of a madman. To believe such things – you have to be an uneducated simpleton.

And He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (vv. 65) He is no madman! And I pray that you would be granted by the Father to be such a simpleton – that that the Father, by the work of the Holy Spirit, would grant you to believe such things.

There are many who sadly, as much as they claim they are Christians, who fail to trust Christ. They do not see the importance of the meal Jesus places before us. Some disbelieve it is what Jesus declares – His body given for us to eat; and His blood shed for us to drink that we might have forgiveness and eternal life.

Still others disbelieve that they need this bread from Heaven for their eternal life. They do so by despising this holy meal. Some discontinue coming regularly – some discontinue coming altogether – either way, they think that they can get through this life and into the next life without the Bread of Life come to feed us.

John’s accounts of this dialogue with Jesus is not over.

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him. So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God.” (vv. 66-69)

Dear friends, God Himself comes to feed His people – Christ comes to you! Eat His flesh! Drink His blood! Partake of holy food and be granted forgiveness unto life everlasting. This is God’s most precious gift to you. Receive it in faith and hope.

In the name of Jesus! Amen.