

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“The Bread of Life Satisfies”

Rev. David K. Groth

August 1, 2021

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (John 6:35).

That’s quite a promise. “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger?” Hunger and thirst are universal experiences. We feel both of them every day. No matter how many times you go back to the buffet line, no matter how many times you refill your cup, the satisfaction never lasts. Eventually, you’re going to be hungry again and thirst again.

We are always hungering for something. Even when our stomachs are full, we’re still hungry for something. As the song goes, we “can’t get no satisfaction.” And so it was 2,000 years ago.

Jesus had been preaching and teaching and healing in the towns and countryside of Galilee. But it was time for a much-needed breather, so he says to his disciples, “Come away with me to a quiet place by yourselves and get some rest.” They hop into a boat and cross the Sea of Galilee, likely to the north-eastern shores, desolate and remote compared to the western shores. But the crowds see where He’s heading, and, walking along the shorelines, they follow the trajectory of the boat, meeting Him on the far side. And Jesus can’t help Himself; He has compassion on them and begins teaching them and healing their sick. The disciples are less than enthusiastic, and they figure that because they are in a remote area, there’s no place for the crowd to buy food, so it’s time to send them on their way. Of course, this leads to the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, which he manages with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Matthew 14:20, “All ate, and all were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.” After this, he tells His disciples to go by boat to the other side while he dismisses the crowds, and then he withdraws to a mountain by himself to pray.

But, as it always does, the next day, their hunger returns. The crowds decide to look for Jesus again. Once they find him, they ask, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus cuts to the chase as is His habit. “You are looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” What’s there not to like about it, sitting there on the grassy hillside next to the Sea, eating what was probably the best bread they ever tasted. They didn’t even have to wait in a line; the disciples brought the food to them.

When my mom pulls out the stops and prepares a really nice meal for the family, someone will inevitably ask, “So, what time would you like us to come tomorrow night?” It gets an easy laugh, but this crowd of thousands, they’re not laughing. This was serious business. Malnourishment was an everyday possibility then; meals didn’t come as readily or predictably as they do today. So this crowd is seriously thinking it’d be nice to have a regular picnic like this. That’s the thing about miracles; once you’ve had one, you always want another. If He fed you once in a miraculous way, why wouldn’t He do it again? Clearly it was no skin off His back. If you’ve been healed once, why would Jesus choose not to heal you a year later? Miracles are like potato chips. It’s hard to have just one.

This time, however, Jesus offered more than just loaves and fishes. He offered food that does not perish, but rather “endures to eternal life” (6:27). The people heard this literally, and liked the sound of this food and asked Him how to get it. That is when Jesus spoke the promise for this week’s sermon: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst” (6:35).

You and I are constantly searching. Searching for a happier home life. Searching for a medical treatment that will work. Searching for recognition and respect, searching for the best deal, or the best brand to buy, searching for more vacation, more income, more security, searching for more popularity at school, or more visits from our grown children or grandchildren. We are always searching for something. The problem,

of course, is all the things we search for are perishable. They don't last. It makes me think of the Olympics. Even if you got a gold medal in Rio, it's not enough. You have to get one in Tokyo. You have to defend your title. One season's success does not satisfy; the hunger returns.

"Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger" Jesus said, "and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst." When Jesus promises He can relieve hunger and thirst for good, He is talking about more than food or drink. Luther calls it a "spiritual hunger" (LW 23:43). Sometimes I think we raid the refrigerator to satisfy a spiritual hunger, and that never works. There's only one thing that can satisfy this hunger. It is the Lord Jesus Himself. He alone is imperishable, for He alone has risen from the dead, never to die again. Romans 6, "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."

In John 10, Jesus promises that all to come to Him will live abundantly. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that [you] may have life and have it to the full" (v. 10). Jesus is the bread that satisfies.

All this does not mean we will always be satisfied with everything in this life. Rather, it means our desires will be shaped by Him and satisfied by Him. Psalm 37, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (v.4). On this, Augustine wrote, "Distinguish the desires of your heart from the desires of your flesh; distinguish as much as you can" (NPNF1 8:92).

Jesus, the Bread of Life, promises satisfaction when we come to Him in faith. He once told the crowd, "Do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6).

In our Old Testament lesson God promised, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you". And He did, first with the manna . . . then with His Son Jesus.

He was born in Bethlehem, which literally means the House of Bread. Later, he takes five small barley loaves and breaks them and distributes them, and no matter how much he gives away, there's always more to give. All ate and all were satisfied.

Then the next day, He says, "Do not labor for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life. . . I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

Then, later still, He takes the Passover bread and breaks it and gives it to His disciples declaring it is His body, for them, for us. In bread and wine, he becomes our food and drink, our forgiveness, our salvation. This is our manna in the desert. This is our sustenance for the journey in the wilderness of this life until we reach the Promised Land. This bread carries the freight of our Lord's body, and with it His grace and forgiveness and salvation. As we eat and drink from the Body and Blood of Christ, our mortal bodies become united with the risen Christ. Our deaths, then, do not mean oblivion, but rather communion with Him; not destruction but passage to life. He indeed is the Bread of Life.

This is Good News, because that day is coming, sooner than we think, when you and I will learn that our own resources are depleted: that we've reached deeply into our own physical, intellectual, emotional, and maybe financial resources, and there's nothing left, that we have spent all we have. That day is coming when we realize, perhaps for the very first time, our hands are truly empty, and the only thing left for us is to acknowledge that truth and throw ourselves on the mercy and grace of God. But that day doesn't belong to deprivation and hunger and thirst and death. It belongs to Him.

And the Last Day, when He returns, that Day is coming soon too, when we will hear the blast of the trumpet and the thunder of His voice commanding us out of our graves. That Day approaches when we will be given new bodies, new joints, new eyes, and ears and lungs and heart and teeth and taste buds to sit at table with Him and all the saints and feast on the banquet of good things he provides, the finest of meats and best of wines. All will eat and all will be satisfied.

"Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Amen.