

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

Exodus 16:2-15

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:22-35

I suspect that most of y'all believe in God. That's good. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 6:4); the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier; there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:5-6). I suspect that most of y'all believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). That's good. God's Word, God's scriptural revelation centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the incarnate Son of God – true God and true man in one person (John 5:39). The Bible addresses you like nothing else can, like nothing else in this world. Your life in this world is to be interpreted through God's Word. You have a Creator. Your Creator made in you in such a way that you need to eat. Your biology, your constitution requires that you eat, that you consume food, calories, energy to function. Do you suppose that there's a reason for that, a reason that goes beyond mere utility? Food; do you enjoy it? Food; it gives you something, doesn't it? Appetite; man has an appetite. Not just food; man's appetite can be pretty carnal, pretty self-centered, pretty unholy. How many of y'all struggle with your appetite? How many of y'all have ever found yourself in a bad place because of your appetite? We're all sinners.

For three weeks we're going on a food journey, a journey of Christian discovery, a journey of self-understanding. The Bible itself is our interpretative device. I guarantee that at the end of this brief journey you will be wiser, stronger, and your life in this world will be clearer. See the Israelites in the wilderness. They're craving the Egyptian menu. Why in blazes are they craving the Egyptian menu? They had just made it out of that wretched place. Slavery and death was on the menu in Egypt and they are fantasizing about it like it was paradise, like it was Michelin 3 star cuisine, gourmet dishes day and night. God had delivered them in spectacular fashion, protecting them from the plague of death by the blood of the Lamb, opening the Red Sea, leading them with a pillar cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Pharaoh had made their lives miserable and now they engage in revisionist history: "...we sat by meat pots and ate bread to the full" (Exodus 16:3). No they didn't. Egypt was run by a demonic despot who killed their babies and made their lives bitter with forced labor. Israel wanted to go back to that. Just to satisfy their appetite, Israel endorsed the idea of going back to that.

Egypt is unbelief. Egypt is darkness. Egypt is pagan to the hilt. Is that where you want to dwell? Is that where you want to abide? You don't need to take a time machine to get to Egypt these days. You don't need a ticket on Trans World Airlines to get to Egypt these days. Egypt is all around us. God has brought you out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). You are a chosen people. You have come through the Red Sea of baptism and the Promised Land is your home. You are making your way to heaven and you need to eat. So many others are feasting on Egyptian bondage, Egyptian philosophy, Egyptian tyranny, and Egyptian death. Carnal appetites are very much en vogue. Christianity will always have these words: "...walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). Christianity will always have these words: "Be holy for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). Christianity will always have these words: "...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your

spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). To be sure, we died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Romans 6:2). Egypt is in the rear view mirror. God feeds us with something better.

The Israelites received manna, miraculous food which God gave to them as a gift. God gave them their daily bread. Twice as much was provided on Fridays so there would be no labor on their Sabbath (Exodus 16:29). He tested them with the food (Exodus 16:4). It was renewed every day. No need to carry any of it on their pilgrimage. Wherever they went in the wilderness the manna was there. But if you were lazy and didn’t gather it in the morning you wouldn’t find it in the afternoon (Exodus 16:21). If you were greedy and tried to hoard some, it would stink and develop maggots, a fairly unpleasant surprise (Exodus 16:20). Some tested God’s word regarding the manna. Those folks learned. Receive God’s gifts in God’s prescribed way and you will be blessed. Try and get them in your own way and you court disaster. The Israelites were fed. By God’s grace, the Israelites were fed with bread from heaven and they made it to the Promised Land.

This is your story. On a deeper level than your photo albums, this is your story. Your story continues. Jesus had just fed 5,000 men and the crowds were euphoric in a worldly sort of way. What the crowds wanted was a bread-king and they had it in mind force Jesus into that office. Remember, carnal appetites... they want to run the show. Man wants to crown God as his carnal king, as his carnal lapdog, as one who will feed their carnal appetites while giving their self-constructed religion the semblance of righteousness. Jesus saw through their charade. Jesus saw through their religious pretense. “...you are seeking me not because you saw the signs but because you ate you fill of the loaves” (John 6:26). Jesus tells the truth to our face. Christ’s church is in the business of telling the truth to people’s faces. And then He reorients their minds, their hearts. “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:27). Does Christ’s voice reorient you? When everything in your life is noisy, cluttered with vanity, when your responsibilities bark at you, and your disappointments hang like shadows in the mirror, does Christ’s voice reorient you?

I AM the bread of life. That is a remarkable statement. Jesus used God’s proper name in the OT to identify Himself – I AM. And Jesus tells us that He is our bread, the bread of life. Not the earthly bread of biology, not that kind of life. He is the bread of heaven, the bread of *God’s* life, holy life, eternal life. God became man. That reorients humanity. Curved in on ourselves; that’s how Martin Luther describes fallen man. When we were in Egypt we were oriented in on ourselves but God brought us out of that wretched place. We’ve been delivered from bondage to sin and death. We’ve been brought out of Egypt. Satan has no claim on us. Carnal appetites don’t rule us. Christ came to sacrifice Himself for us, to pay the price of our freedom, to claim us as His own. Jesus said this: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and accomplish his work” (John 4:34). How was Jesus oriented? The Lord Christ was oriented entirely toward His Father and entirely toward you. The will of Him who sent Jesus was that Jesus should sacrifice Himself on the holy cross. That’s the work that the Incarnate God came to do. To live a perfect life and give His life as a ransom for sinners; that was Jesus’ food.

In order to be your bread, the Son of God must be crucified. On the cross Christ became guilty, heinously guilty. To be your bread, Jesus took on the world’s sin and He did not evade the punishment. The holy Messianic Savior saved you by bearing all of your guilt. As God, He

could take it all. As man, Jesus was capable of dying and that's the punishment. As God and man He rose. Death couldn't hold Him; He rose. His sacrifice was perfect. His righteousness was perfect. He destroyed death by dying because He is holy. Death is undone because sin is the power of death and sin was paid for, taken away, removed. I AM the bread of life.

The Word became flesh that He might be our bread. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. The food in your pantry perishes along with this mortal body. The food of God's grace, the food of Christ's sacrifice does not perish. We're reoriented. Away from Egypt and toward our heavenly destiny; we are reoriented. Love reorients us; God's love in Christ reorients us toward our heavenly Father and toward our neighbor. Sacrifice, humility, truth, love, grace and forgiveness do not perish. We are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are reoriented by Him who is the bread of life and we will not perish (John 3:16).