

**Weekend of Sunday, August 5, 2018**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 18/Proper 13/Year B**  
**Primary Text: John 6:24-35**  
**Sermon Title: “A Righteous and Holy One”**

**Theme**

*Many of the five thousand people Jesus fed in the wilderness continued to follow him throughout the countryside. Jesus challenges them to consider the real nature of their quest.*

**Text**

<sup>24</sup>When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were [beside the sea,] they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

<sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the

Father has set his seal.” <sup>28</sup>Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” <sup>30</sup>So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?”

<sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ” <sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup>They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

<sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

## Sermon

By way of a more vocational introduction, I am what is known as a second career pastor. I had a thirteen-year career in manufacturing management before entering seminary in the Lutheran church. I was ordained on July 19, 1997, just a little over twenty-one years ago. And in that twenty-one years it has been my honor to serve God and God's people through three churches in the Northeast Ohio.

And in that twenty-one years many people have come and gone. One in particular that I would like to take a moment of personal privilege to mention is your friend and sister-Squirrel, Marie Bokesch. Marie was the matriarch of the Bokesch family that you and I know, and her passing this last January is the reason I am here. Paula, her daughter, invited me to preach at the annual commemoration you do to honor those Squirrels who have passed in the last year. That week was taken, and so this weekend is when we could work it out. Thank you for having me.

Over the next several minutes I am going to give you a pastor's perspective on this story, because I think that I have unique insight into how this story could be considered a story about life in the church. Listen and see if you don't agree.

I am Lutheran and so we tend to stick to a thing called a lectionary, a prescribed cycle of the key stories of the Bible. I don't know what you heard as sermon text last week, but in the liturgical church we had Mark's version of the feeding of the five-thousand. Though this passage for today is from John, it is John's version of the events of the day after the same feeding miracle.

John's coverage of the event of that day is more focused on the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand than what actually happened all day with those people. Matthew wrote that Jesus healed people. Mark wrote that Jesus taught them many things. Luke wrote that Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed to be cured. John didn't say what Jesus did but I think it is safe to presume that it was the same stuff that happened everywhere Jesus went; preaching and teaching, and performing signs and miracles. Jesus met the needs of the people he met. Who wouldn't be attracted to that?

At the conclusion of that story Jesus sent his disciples off across the sea without him so that he could go up a mountain to retreat and reflect and commune with his

heavenly Father. Later, in the night, those disciples were caught in rough seas caused by high winds and oh, at the same time Jesus, who was out walking on the same turbulent sea, met up with them, got into their boat, calmed the sea, and immediately the boat was transported to their destination.

However, some of the crowd that experienced that miracle feeding first hand hung around over night and when they couldn't find Jesus the next morning they went looking for him. They noticed that no other boat had left and that was a mystery to them and that is where today's reading picks up.

<sup>24</sup>So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

<sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

You see Jesus was a pretty sweet deal. He took care of all their ailments so their physical life was better. He took care of their food needs so they wouldn't have to toil for food. Yea, maybe they had to endure his sermons but at the end of the day, they got to eat. Is it any wonder they went looking for him? He was their gravy train! Their meal ticket. Their sugar daddy.

Reminds me of a spring break trip that I went on with one of my brothers and a bunch of friends. It was a road trip to Key West on probably \$20 a day including gas. Each night we went to the famous Key West dock and watched the sunset and were entertained by the numerous street acts that performed for tips, and ... we made sure we went to the Buddhists who banged drums and chanted but then handed out a vegetarian meal. We decided we could endure their monotonous music every night for the sake of some free grub. Maybe that is what the crowd in this story thought – we'll endure his preaching because the meal is worth it.

John wrote that when they found Jesus they asked him how and when he got there. But Jesus didn't bother to answer their question. Instead he said, "You aren't looking for me because in the miracle you experienced yesterday you saw a sign that I was from God. No, you are looking for me because you are hungry again!"

The Greek word that John used that we translate as “sign” is (σημειον, *semeion*) and is used only twice in John’s gospel up to this point. There was the turning of water into wine which was for the disciples a sign that Jesus was from God; and there was the healing of the royal official’s son which was a sign that Jesus had the power to give life. Both signs took place in Cana and as a result people came to faith in Jesus.

But in Capernaum, the feeding of the five thousand had a different effect. The people who benefitted from the day with Jesus, including the providing of a meal, did not come to faith but in fact the miracle had a detrimental effect on their spiritual life. There were ready to get on the Jesus gravy train!

So here I go, life in the church is often like this. People come to the church for any number of reasons but some of them that I hear that make me cringe are:

- I need to get religion.
- My spouse needs religion.
- My kids need religion.
- My marriage needs religion.
- My family needs religion.
- I need a job.
- I need food or money.
- I need, I need, I need ...

Inevitably, one of three things happens.

- The need gets met and they go away. Life is better, at least for a time.
- The need doesn’t get met and they go away. Life never got any better for them. They gave “religion” a chance and are now onto to some other quick fix.
- And rarely, they engage the process of the spiritual life and there is genuine conversion and they stay and grow and life usually, but not always, gets better.

But this often requires giving up behaviors that are spiritually harmful, and taking on behaviors that are spiritually beneficial, and that takes time and work and sacrifice and an awareness that something good is happening to oneself over time.

This is what Jesus was referring to when he said, “Don’t work for food that fills your belly for a day, but work for food that will bring you eternal life.”

The crowd in Capernaum didn’t want to work. They wanted their needs met and they wanted Jesus to meet them *now* – “It’s time for breakfast Jesus, chop chop!”

Jesus did offer them the food he was speaking of, this “food that endures for eternal life” but the disgruntled crowd asked, “What sign are you going to give us so that we know this process of a *spiritual life* will be worth it?”

Can you believe it? This feeding miracle was the most public display of the power of God in all of the NT. They were there. They experienced it ... and they seem to be asking, “Jesus, that was yesterday, what have you done for us lately!”

Again, let me relate this to life in the church. People come and go. Maybe they take some comfort from the church, the fellowship, the pastor, some sense of the presence of the Lord, ... and then when their crisis is over, so is their working on the process of the spiritual life.

(Pause)

If this sermon sounds like I’m complaining, I apologize. I’m not really. When I worked in industry I had thankless customers too. And I’m not that special, you all know people like this. My wife the teacher has had parents of students that she couldn’t do enough for. The school is the answer to everything. Or the government.

The point I am making is that the thing that Jesus was really offering was so much more than a full belly for a few hours. He’s was offering life eternal with God; communion with the Holy; a banquet that never ends, so wrote Isaiah and John.

And he continues to offer that to everyone today.

The morning after the big feast there on the seashore in Capernaum the people seemed to be looking for Jesus, but were they really?

I presume some of you have been faithful Christians for a long time – we often find that in the church today. There have been times when you clearly sensed God’s

blessing on your lives. There undoubtedly have been times where you felt like you were wandering in the desert too. But you trusted that God was with you through it all. You stayed faithful. I am certain there is a place at the wedding banquet table reserved for you.

But there are others that might think I was talking about you a few moments ago; you come here, or another church, because you need something. I caution you, don't work for food that perishes. Jesus will not be your rabbit's food, your lucky charm, your genie in a bottle that you can conjure up and then put back when you get your needs met.

And I don't want to make it a quid pro quo kind of thing. I'm not saying Jesus will bless you once you start being a blessing to him. He might bless you anyway. But I am saying that Jesus has a way of looking at the heart of a person and if you aren't sincere then I think you will continue to be hungry.

Are you looking for Jesus? Are you *really* looking for Jesus? He can be found here. He wants to be found here. In fact he's been looking for you.

## **Prayer**

Lord God, we are looking for Jesus, at least we have convinced ourselves that we are.

- We hunger for the spiritual food that only he can offer.
- We need the obedience and the discipline that a Christ-like life will deliver.
- We want the eternal that only he can offer.

But only you know whether our intentions are sincere. Search our hearts and know us. Remove that which continues to separate us from you, so that we may know the joy of this life and the life to come. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.