

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it & not die.

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

My wife hasn't spoken to me in three days. I think it has something to do with what happened last Sunday night when she thought she heard a noise downstairs. She nudged me & whispered, "Wake up, wake up!" "What's the matter?" I asked. "There are burglars in the kitchen. I think they're eating the tuna casserole I made tonight."

Still groggy from having been woken in the middle of the night, I replied with the first thing that came to mind, "Well that'll teach 'em! They'll never come back." *PAUSE*

There's a huge difference between Jesus, as the Bread from heaven, & tuna casserole, yet many people react to them in the same way. In today's Gospel reading: "...the Jews grumbled about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'" Later in John six, Jesus continued to push His point that He is the Bread from heaven they must eat:

"Whoever feeds on my flesh & drinks my blood abides in me, & I in him... When many of His disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?' ...many of His disciples turned back & no longer walked with Him." Jesus as the Bread from heaven doesn't exactly appeal to everyone's appetite.

Maybe appetite isn't something you think about very often. You just eat when you feel like it. Or you eat when a meal, or a snack, is put in front of you. If you've been in the Weight Watchers Program though, you've been taught to pay attention to your appetite because it can fool you. Many things besides your body's need for food will trigger your appetite.

Other times, things like the fresh smell of a road kill skunk will shut down an appetite. But appetite for food isn't the only craving that drives us as human beings. People have a desire

to be loved, or respected, or needed. Those can be seen as appetites. The adrenaline rush junkies may have a 'need for speed,' or sky diving, or slasher movies. Some have an appetite for organizing things; others an appetite for change & chaos. Gambling, drugs & alcohol are very addictive because they meet the needs of certain powerful appetites.

What kind of appetite do you have for Christ? Do you have as deep a desire for Jesus as an alcoholic may have for whiskey? Have earthly needs & pleasures become the focal point of your existence, with Jesus fading into the background as a dull & unappetizing concern? Have the pressures of your immediate appetites caused you to work solely for food that spoils?

For a couple weeks now the background for our Gospel readings has been the feeding of the 5000. The people failed to see the sign Jesus gave them in that miracle & so last week Jesus urged them to work for food that doesn't spoil, to work for food that endures eternally.

The people then ask for a sign that they might see & believe in Him. They remind Jesus that their fathers received a sign in the Wilderness, called manna. Jesus takes that picture they give, of manna, or heavenly bread, & He uses it to point out that their Father in heaven not only gives earthly bread to eat, but also the bread of eternal life that is Jesus.

As in last week's lesson our Savior is using bread figuratively, & this time, the sign He's giving them, is Himself, as He says: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, & whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Regarding Himself as the sign, Jesus concludes, "But I said to you that you have seen me & yet do not believe."

The group of people Jesus is speaking to see very plainly that Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father & mother they know, is identifying Himself as the Son of God. It confuses & it offends them. They will not accept that Jesus is God. Eventually, that becomes the primary reason that Jesus is rejected, opposed, & crucified. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead,

John wrote, “So the chief priests & the Pharisees gathered the Council & said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, & the Romans will come & take away both our place & our nation.’ ...So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” They’d had their fill of this Jesus.

Have you been relying upon Christ to be the main course of your existence, or are you only using the Son of God as a snack, something to tide you over until the meal your appetite is really interested in? Jesus, in all His godly wisdom, is trying to teach that He gives life far beyond anything we can scrape together from our earthly existence.

So a woman was called for jury duty. She felt confident of her ability to answer the questions asked of the prospective jurors. As a young attorney, her son had filled her in on what to expect. When asked about the occupations of family members, she answered, “My son is a lawyer.” As a follow-up, she was asked if she’d ever used the services of an attorney.

The mother, not wanting to appear biased by her son’s occupation, replied, “Only to mow my lawn.” **PAUSE**

Have you been relegating the Creator of the universe to the trivial matters of your life? He’s waiting to provide you with joy & contentment in ALL circumstances of life – every single one. When Jesus says, “I am the Bread of life...” He means that He’s the source of life, the Author of life, the Creator of life. We are insane to look for it anywhere else.

Putting God anywhere but in 1st place, is not allowing God to be God in your life. And it’s to reject the joy & contentment Jesus yearns to give you. In the OT reading, Elijah is so worn out, so exhausted & afraid, that he says, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life...”

He wants to die, yet the bread the angel gives, sustains Elijah for 40 days & 40 nights. That wasn’t a meal of food that spoils. That was a meal from God Himself & that kind of

protein is available to us, His children, every day of our existence here. Have you been paying attention to your appetite for the Bread of Life? Jesus' claim to be the bread of life conflicts with experience & with human reason. Yet everyone who believes in Jesus as Savior will be raised on the Last Day & have life everlasting.

It's in that way, that Jesus is the bread of life. His words are like a fire or a hammer – they challenge & they offend His hearers. Jesus' Words divide us into those two camps, those who, by God's grace believe, & those who by our own grievous fault, choose not to believe.

Jesus came not just to provide universal health care for the sick, or food stamps for the poor, but He came especially to provide for our true life, for eternal life already in the here & now. There are many people in this world who are physically alive, but since they are spiritually dead, they really are nothing more than dead, already today.

When the people in John's Gospel reading complain, Jesus tells them to stop grumbling, & listen: "Everyone who has heard & learned from the Father comes to me... 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 & they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it & 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."

Put Jesus to work doing more than mowing your lawn. You have a desire to be loved, respected, & needed. Jesus is the Bread from heaven sent to supply those needs. Seek first the kingdom of God, & His righteousness, & you will be fed. Jesus died for all those times we put Him in 2nd place, or 3rd or 4th. The forgiveness of those sins brings joy & contentment & life.

The 'need for speed,' or slasher movies, wanting to have everything in its place, or loving chaos, gambling, drugs & alcohol, or me, my self & I; all of those appetites have been

met by Yahweh, in Jesus Christ. All our sins are forgiven, erased & the penalty paid for. That's the news we call good, because it frees from our earthly, human, sinful appetites & turns us over to the heart of our Savior, who will not snuff out a smoldering wick.

His resurrection from the dead, on the 3rd day just as He predicted, vindicated Jesus' claims about Himself, His claim to be the Bread of Life. Faith in Jesus, believing in Him as Savior, is an ongoing, dynamic, living relationship. Life with Christ is so much more than eating & drinking, satisfying hungers, or appetites.

The miracles recorded in the 6th chapter of the Gospel of John are meant to direct our heart, our mind, & our eyes to Jesus, who said, "I am the resurrection & the life," "I am the Bread of life," "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," "I am the Light of the world," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Way, & the Truth, & the Life."

Checking our spiritual appetite should be a daily routine for in this sinful world. You & I have failed, already in our most basic task as children of God – that of seeking bread for life. We are directed by the Word of God to find comfort in His grace & mercy. After the difficult words of the 6th chapter of John, Jesus asked the Twelve, "You do not want to leave too, do you?"

What a blessing it is to know the very words of Simon Peter, as he put it so well, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..." Amen.

Christ the unchanging Word to every passing age, whose timeless teachings still are heard set forth on Scripture's page; transform our thought & mind, enlighten all who read, within Your Word by faith to find the bread of life indeed. Christ the redeeming Son, who shares our human birth, & by His death salvation won for every child of earth; inspire our hearts, we pray, to tell Your love abroad, that all may honor Christ today & follow Him as Lord. Amen.