

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. It is not appointed to be read in the TLH one-year series. It is the appointed text (24 – 35) for Pentecost 11B in the LW three-year series. In LSB, we will be spending the next three Sundays in the sixth chapter of John, working in a very chronological manner through that chapter, so you might want to look ahead and not steal your own thunder.

The tendency is to put all you know about the bread of life onto the table on this the first Sunday of the three, and then later have to preach on the OT or EP because you have no more material. Better to exhaust the text every Sunday and preach three different sermons on bread. We might look at these three Sundays as chapters in a book or acts in a play; separate but related and flowing.

When I first learned of it at CTCRF in the late seventies, I found Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to be interesting. My hearers might likewise find it so. At the base of Maslow's pyramid are physiological needs: breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, and excretion. Homeostasis is the drive to be in good weather, and excretions are things that come out of our bodies.

Food is a very basic need of life, and hunger amongst the most primal of drives. Most of us know what it's like to experience hunger, but few of us know what it's like to be hungry. To review the obvious; for most of human history, the getting of food for survival has been at the forefront of human consciousness. For much of human history, starvation has been a very real possibility.

People still starve today. Perhaps the most familiar instance of mass starvation is the Irish Potato Famine. There is a plethora of books on the subject; the one I have read and recommend as a good read is *The Graves Are Walking* by John Kelly. Included are vivid and troubling accounts of the actual act of starvation and what people do when faced with starvation; almost anything.

That starvation was caused by a potato blight not limited to Ireland, and it was not planned. Some are. Like the one engineered by Stalin against Ukraine, as chronicled by Robert Conquest in *Harvest of Sorrow*, which is not a very good read, but a hard read, and probably should be read. That starvation was deliberate, and not uncommon in the 20th Century and historically,

The thing about hunger, food, and eating is that when you eat food, after a while you get hungry again, and you need more food. That's why we ask for and the Wilderness Wanderers received

“daily bread,” and actually God’s creation is built to do just that. In this closed system, physical food is taken care of. God created plants and seeds, the sun, water, and the earth, to name a few.

He has also created things like Nitrogen and minerals, and He made delivery systems, and those plants take in the Carbon Dioxide produced by living creatures – including the humans – and they in turn produce the Oxygen needed by other things, which then produce Carbon Dioxide, needed by the Oxygen producers, and on and on and on. Creation is actually very efficient and sustainable.

In Paradise they had it all, including plenty of food to eat. Shortages of food begin with the fall, and continued shortages come because of sin, not because of a defect in God’s Creation. It’s a distribution, not a supply problem. Send food to Somalia, what happens to it? People for whom starvation of political enemy is a political weapon keep it from getting to hungry people.

The British could have helped the starving Irish, and at first they did. But then other motives took over and they allowed what happened to happen. Some of the English even took the tack that if we keep helping them, they will never learn to help themselves, and there is some truth to that. It’s one of the reasons why the closer and smaller charitable giving, the better.

Others used Scientific Racism – an Enlightenment Idea – to justify the mass starvation. The Irish were a lower species than the English, they reasoned, and if they can’t feed themselves, that’s what Natural Selection is there for. It didn’t help that centuries before Henry VII had combined church and state, and the secular state controlled the church and the clergy as well as distribution.

Our problem in this country is distribution, not supply, and it’s hard to go hungry in this country. But if your mother and/or father would rather spend money on (fill in blank) instead of food, that child might get hungry. Whether we’re talking about that child or a starving nation, the problem is not with God, but with sinful man. It’s on us, not on God, that people get hungry and starve.

The Feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle of Jesus recorded by all four Gospel writers. Chronologically, what we read today follows last week’s text (Walk on Water), and the week before (5,000 Fed) in John’s Gospel as well as the synoptics, and are these the same people who are hungry again or new people who are hungry again? Probably some of both.

Textual Notes

22. John says that it is now “Τῇ ἐπαύριον – the next day” after Jesus walked on water. We note that the walking had been preceded immediately in John by the feeding of the five thousand. John sets the location for that on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and he tells us that the crowds who remained there noticed what we saw last week; the disciples had left, but Jesus had stayed.

The next three verses go to great lengths to describe how this all played out before their very eyes. The people who were in the boat saw what had just happened – the feeding of the 5,000 – but the masses had not seen Jesus walk on water. They counted the boats, and there was one too many vessels, and they were at a loss to explain how He got to the other side of the sea without a boat.

Luke (9:10) tells us that the Feeding took place in “Bethsaida.” There is recent scholarly debate about the location of Bethsaida, which was on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The boat last week was headed away from there, bound for Capernaum, their home port. Jesus stayed behind to pray, then came to them walking on water, then they continued on to their destination.

23. Enter new, real characters into the true story; “ἀλλὰ ἦλθεν πλοῖα ἔκ Τιβεριάδος – but came boats from Tiberias, a town on the southwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Today a growing city of 43,148, in that day it was a very new settlement. WIK says that it was established in 20 A.D. in honor of the Emperor Tiberius. By land, it’s a ten mile drive from there to Bethsaida.

Those boats from Tiberius are said to come “ἐγγὺς τοῦ τόπου ὅπου ἔφαγον τὸν ἄρτον – near the place where they ate the bread.” As Jesus will soon point out, they came there because they had heard of the free lunch offered there, and they were hoping to get a piece of that bread. He modifies “bread” by adding the phrase “εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ Κυρίου – the Lord having blessed.”

By doing that, John is directing our attention away from the actual, physical, miraculous feeding and towards the spiritual aspect of the feeding. John does that a lot; Well Woman and “living water,” for example, and it will soon become clear why he does this; this is the place where the people desire to make Jesus into what theologians and scholars like to call a “Bread King.”

I have used that term from the pulpit. I’ve been hearing it all my life, and for about half of my life I had not a clue what it meant. I don’t know if the average Joe and Jane have heard the term, but I have used it, and I have explained it, and the what the term represents is important, as is the very term itself; in America, we don’t have a Bread King, but it looks like we may be getting there.

With people talking openly about taking America socialist, maybe it’s time to start preaching against socialism, like they used to. Theological opposition a hundred years ago was based on theological grounds – the commandment against stealing was often invoked. Now we have over one hundred years of actual socialism to observe and to see what an absolute disaster it always is.

Socialism is bad for Christianity and always simply opposes orthodoxy. They often co-opt – only to pervert – Christian ideas, and liberal denominations carry water for them. You note that I have not mentioned a political party. I don’t have to, but you know who I’m talking about. I have never mentioned that one party is more pro-life than the other murderous one, and I don’t have to.

As for the Bread King, Joseph rose to be second-most powerful man in Egypt; he controlled the grain; life and death. The nature of food and hunger is that you get hungry, you eat food, and then you get hungry again, and it wasn't a one-time deal. It was a constant – not one-time thing – in Ancient Egypt you got food at the will and whim of the person who controlled it, Joseph.

Remember why Joseph's brothers travelled from Palestine to Egypt? Because there had been a famine in Palestine and there was a shortage of food, and they were hungry. And why did they find themselves standing in front of Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery? Because Joseph had control of the food, and with the food he controlled each of their lives or their deaths.

Egypt produces a lot of grain. When we think of Egypt, we think of pyramids and deserts, but think Nile Valley. The Nile River floods, in some places for miles around, and when it floods, it leaves behind fresh topsoil, and they irrigate, and produce a lot of grain. Today, the government still exercises a lot of control over the wheat, and that's the norm even these days in Egypt.

At the time of Jesus, the Roman Republic – like ours, was morphing into the Roman Empire – power was coming to be found in one man, the Emperor, and the government was increasingly using “bread and circuses” to keep the masses content. About half the days on Roman calendar were holidays, barges full of wheat from Egypt – under govt' control – kept their bellies full.

Noting that slavery has been a part of the human condition from very early on, and that for most of human history nobody gave that a second thought, and that – while the Christian religion got rid of it, other religions embrace slavery – we know that because they wrote it down – one of the best ways to control a slave was with food. Frederick Douglass, for example, had been a slave.

"I have often been so pinched with hunger, that I have fought with the dog – 'Old Nep' – for the smallest crumbs that fell from the kitchen table, and have been glad when I won a single crumb in the combat. Many times have I followed, with eager step, the waiting-girl when she went out to shake the table cloth, to get the crumbs and small bones flung out for the cats."

Ukraine has for centuries been known as “The Breadbasket of Europe” because of wheat, which can be made into bread. In Ukraine, in 1930s, millions of Ukrainians died of starvation. Lenin nationalized the factories. Stalin collectivized the land. Government took your land, redistributed it, everybody works the land – nobody worked the land – send it to city first, then farmers eat...

In the 90's Americans couldn't figure out why those babies in Somalia were starving – still are. We and others sent them boatloads of food. But it never made it to starving people. Bread Kings used that food as a weapon. Today, in Venezuela, having the card or not is a matter of life and death by starvation. If you have the card – issued by govt' – you get food. If not – Rabbits.

Food and hunger in American are different and unusual historically and in modern times. The farmer plants seeds, and they grow, and he can do what he wants with the produce; feed it to animals and make pork chops/rib-eyes – you can sell those animals – or you can take it to the river. Either way, you're going to get a check for whatever amount the market says you ought to get.

You can plant fruit trees, and you can plant a garden and do what you will with it; eat it, give it away, or sell it for whatever price the market says. You can go the grocery store, and choose from

20, 30, The Supercenter has 142,000 different items to choose from, including groceries. Govt regulates some things for health and safety and other, but compared to other times/places...

At the time of Jesus, many people lived hand to mouth. When you killed an animal or caught a fish, you ate until it was gone. The salting of fish goes back a long way, but with no refrigeration, the concept of leftovers was almost unknown. You ate fruits and vegetables when they were in season, and bread was an important staple, arguably the most important of all foods.

They grew cereal grains; oats, wheat, barley, rye, and if you remove the moisture from those grains, they can last for quite a while in storage. Talk to a farmer about drying corn and beans and about how dry grain stores better and for longer than higher-moisture grain. Maybe even take a tour of the farm and see how a dryer works. You might even talk about dryers in your sermon!

We observe that the people involved in desiring Jesus to be their Bread King seem to have time on their hands. Do they even have jobs? We observe also that they have their women and children with them. In their minds, their best bet for their next meal is Jesus, and they want Him to feed them on a regular basis. They want Jesus to become their Bread King, and He discerns as much.

24. The crowds wanted to see Jesus, and when they discerned that He was not to be found at Bethsaida, they got into boats, course charted for Capernaum “ζητοῦντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν – looking for Jesus.” Capernaum is on the northwestern shore of the Sea, on the highway between Bethsaida and Tiberius, but they were traveling by water, and boats were to them what cars are to us.

25. Having sought Him out, they find Him, and later on John (59) places His location in the synagogue. They ask Him, “Ραββεί, πότε ὧδε γέγονας – Rabbi, when did you get here?” They have compared boats to people and location, and they have done the math, and it just doesn’t add up. The essence of their question to Jesus is to inquire how He got here without a boat.

26. Jesus knows full well why they have sought Him out, and it was not to obtain the forgiveness of sins, but ζητεῖτέ με οὐχ ὅτι εἶδετε σημεῖα, ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἐφάγετε ἐκ τῶν ἄρτων καὶ ἐχορτάσθητε – you sought me not because you saw signs (emphatic) but because you ate of the bread and were satisfied.” The last word is the common word used when people have eaten and are filled up.

They knew about – and some of them had maybe even seen it – how Jesus took the two Tilapia and five loaves and do what He did with them, and they saw or heard about the twelve basketfuls of left-overs that were left over. They knew all of that, and what did they take away from it? When we get hungry, we can look this guy up, and He will feed us. It’s what a Bread King does.

27. He now instructs the hearers to “ἐργάζεσθε μὴ τὴν βρῶσιν τὴν ἀπολλυμένην – work not for the food that is dying.” The verb “ἐργάζομαι – to work” occurs ninety-one times in the NT, and here it has the force of saying to these people that their energies are directed at the wrong thing; securing food for their bodies. They should be focusing instead on other things. God, for example.

The noun “βρῶσιν – food” occurs eleven times in the NT, twice in the sixth chapter of Matthew, where Jesus talks about not storing up treasures on earth, where “βρῶσιν – rust” or “decay” will destroy them. The idea here is the same as the idea in Matthew, but food and rust seem like two very different things. Probably the more generic decay is the better word for both metal and food.

The common characteristic shared by both is that they are finite; they both have a shelf life, and given a certain period of time, neither will exist at all. If you use that term “shelf life,” people will know what you’re talking about. Compare and contrast that to the Bread of Life, Who is Jesus Who has no expiration date, and He always is and always will be there to feed our hungry souls.

They are focused on food for the belly, which comes naturally. Not so naturally, especially for people who are hungry; “ἀλλὰ τὴν βρῶσιν τὴν μένουσαν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον – but on the food enduring into eternal life.” Here the meaning of the word “βρῶσιν” gets stood on its head; first the emphatic “but,” and then speaking of food that endures or remains, and for how long?

Into eternity. He’s talking about the food that brings eternal life. He then spends a great deal of time talking about that sort of bread to these people who are hungry. Eternal life “ἣν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑμῖν δώσει – which the Son of man will give to you (pl).” He goes third person here, using the messianic term to impress on the hearers just how large are the stakes here.

They can and we do focus on physical food, which will sustain their earthly lives, about which they already know, and they know that He can give that to them any time He wants to. But they ought to instead focus on the larger picture, the food which can sustain them into eternity, and He can give them that food as well. That food will be the focus today and then for the next two weeks.

28. They seem to take His words to heart, and they ask Him, “Τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Θεοῦ – what should we do, in order to be doing the works of God?” He had instructed them to “ἐργάζεσθε – work” in the previous verse, and they use the same verb and the cognate noun to indicate their willingness to do that. Now they want to know what they have to do to earn food.

That word is the word used to talk about how one might “acquire by labor” food or otherwise. They understand what we all understand; even though God is the One who gives us the food, we have to leave the nest to get it. For most people that means either raising your own food or getting a job to earn money to buy food. We do both, and what a bumper crop we’re getting this year!

At this point, they seem to be sincere in simply wanting to be right with God, and getting eternal life is always a good thing, isn’t it? They are hungry people, but like all people, they do also and more badly want to get to heaven one day. They put it in terms of what they need to *do* in spite of the fact that Jesus has just told them that “the Son of Man” will just give it to you, just like that.

29. He responds to their very straightforward question in a very straightforward manner, saying “Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύητε εἰς ὃν ἀπέστειλεν – this is the work of God, that

you (pl) should believe in Him He sent.” Places like this is where Luther gets the idea that belief is The Good Work, and that the rest of them flow from it. and indeed, they do.

But we must see that the very same *works* done without faith are altogether dead and as nothing, for as your conscience stands toward God and *believes* in him, even so shall it be with your *works*, which proceed from your faith.

As He does quite regularly, and as preachers ought regularly to do, Jesus directs the hearers away from self and their works and towards God and His works, reminding that their contribution to the process is to believe in Him. They want to know what they can do. He wants to tell them what He has done for them. What you can do is believe – have faith in – what He has done for you.

It has been my observation that preachers tend to do just the opposite of what Jesus does; they direct people to their own selves and away from God and faith in Him. Man is the subject and God the object of too many sentences. God ought to be the subject and man the object of most sentences in a sermon. And for what it’s worth, I mostly observe and listen to LCMS preachers.

30. At first glance, His answer to their question seems to have gone in one ear and out the other, but upon further examination, they ask, “Τί οὖν ποιεῖς σὺ σημεῖον, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμέν σοι; τί ἐργάζῃ – well, what sign you do, so that we might see, and might believe in you; what work?” They are calling for a miracle so that they should believe – or keep believing – in Him.

31. Jesus asks what sort of a sign they would have Him to do, and they tell Him that if you could do what Moses did in the Wilderness, that would be swell. All His words about eternal life are well and good, but we’re still hungry, and there is precedent for it, “οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν τὸ μάννα ἔφαγον ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ – our fathers ate manna in the wilderness.” Maybe you could do that?

Out of all the OT incidents they could have chosen, they choose the giving of manna, which was significantly given not just once, but daily. They quote Exodus 16:15, Ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς φαγεῖν – bread from heaven He gave them to eat.” It’s the last verse from the OT reading for today, and you may want to point that out and review the whole manna thing.

32. Then He truly says to them “οὐ Μωϋσῆς δέδωκεν ὑμῖν τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ - it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven.” It was God who gave the bread, and Moses acted as the intermediary, to finish the story. As is His custom, Jesus deflects praise from the Son – and especially from Moses – to the Father.

Grammatically, this phrase might be a question expecting an affirmative answer. The question “didn’t Moses give you bread from heaven?” expects the answer “yes, Moses didn’t give us bread,” which is not the way we talk, but you get it. Then the emphatic “ἀλλ’ ὁ Πατήρ μου δίδωσιν ὑμῖν τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὸν ἀληθινόν – but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven”

That's a statement – all the translations have that – not a question. The verb is in the present tense; God is currently giving genuine bread from heaven. The adjective “genuine” is placed at the end of the sentence for emphasis. The bread of which He speaks is the bread that God constantly gives in this very sustainable ecosystem. It is also the bread found in the Person of Christ.

If your people don't know about type – antitype, you should tell them about it. When speaking of type – antitype, it's not that the type is not real or genuine true – they are all those things – but the antitype reveals the true meaning and especially the import of the type. In this case, the manna in the wilderness is the type and we are about to see that Jesus is the more important antitype.

33. Like the manna in the OT, “ὁ γὰρ ἄρτος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστὶν ὁ καταβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ – the bread of God is coming down from heaven.” The verb is a participle, indicating that the coming down of the bread is currently happening, and it is continuous. That bread is “ζωὴν διδοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ – giving life to the world,” another present participle. The Sacrament is all that.

Without this bread from heaven, the planet would not be able to sustain human life, or any other kind of life and “the world,” which opposes it – the God Who provides it – would be dead. Likewise, if you don't eat of Jesus, the Bread of Life, then you will be even deadlier; you will die, and then you will die again eternally. The Sacrament is all that, and more.

34. They like what they hear, and say “Κύριε, πάντοτε δὸς ἡμῖν τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον – Lord, always give this bread to us.” They call Him “Lord,” which means that on some level they are believing and having faith in Him. They use the imperative (command) mode to emphatically state how badly they want this bread. The word “this” is the last word in the sentence, again for emphasis.

The sentence sounds a lot like “give us this day our daily bread.” Reference the Exodus text, and tell that story, and also reference the Catechism and “daily bread;” The Fourth Petition. When I reference that petition, I often at the same time will reference the First Article, which talks about how God gives us what we have, and the means – arms, legs, brains, et al – to get what we have.

35. He identifies the bread, telling them “Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς – I am the bread of life.” The phrase “Εγώ εἰμι – I am” is the personal name of God, and Jesus uses the phrase of Himself several times in John, and last week in Mark. When He says it at the end of that harsh confrontation later on (8:58), the religious leaders knew what He was saying and therefore determined to stone Him.

He then assures the hearers that “ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ πεινάσῃ, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ διψήσῃ πώποτε – the one coming to me will never, ever hunger, and the one believing in me will never, ever thirst.” The Christian will never again feel the emptiness of following one of the various vacuous religions that leave us constantly hungering, longing for food to satisfy our souls.

They will instead be constantly nourished on the Bread of Life. And as far as physical hunger goes, God provides for us, and God uses Christians to feed the hungry, and we do that

incompletely. Both promises contain a double negative (οὐ μὴ). In the American language, they would cancel each other out. In the Greek language, the second negative intensifies the first.

Hence the translation “never, ever.”

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