

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I remember when I was a kid, going to the bakery for my mom to get bread, occasionally cookies too. That was an errand I always liked! Fresh baked bread always smells so good. There's something special about the odor, the taste, the feel of really good bread, doesn't even matter which kind. I admit to a weakness for baked goods, all baked goods, but especially bread. The truth is, I like 'em all! I served with a pastor who was a champion bread maker. Any special occasion in your life, and he'd give you a fresh baked loaf of some kind of bread. In fact he would away give loaves of bread just for the pleasure of being able to make more. He stopped in here at Trinity a summer or two ago, of course he had to buy about 100 pounds of flour while he was here. Anything you want to know about baking bread, he was a source of information. You might say he has a weakness for bread.

Now we have a crowd following Jesus, they have a weakness for bread as well. He's just fed a crowd of five thousand, they wanted to make him king, so he went off by himself. They're still looking for Jesus, as he tells them, "because you ate your fill of the loaves." Bread was a staple of diets back then, they want a sure source and supply.

Bread is a staple in our diet too, although perhaps not in the way you're thinking. I'm not talking about bakery bread, fresh baked bread, or any kind of ordinary bread, I'm not referring to the bread that can help sustain physical life in the here and now. I'm talking about the bread of life, the bread from heaven that gives life to the world, the bread that is Jesus.

The crowd following Jesus certainly didn't make that association with him, he obviously could produce the bread that sustains physical life in the here and now, but now they hear Jesus talk about "food that endures for eternal life," they want to know what they "must do to perform the works of God". The work of God. So what is the work of God? "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

So what sign, what work are you performing? Moses gave our ancestors manna in the wilderness, what are you going to do? Signs, miracles, wonders, proof, something concrete, a permanent source of bread, maybe then we'll believe you are who you say you are.

But it wasn't Moses who gave their ancestors bread in the wilderness, it was God. And God gives the "true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." The crowd is still thinking of their collective stomachs, but that's not what Jesus is talking about. So he tells them plainly "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." The crowd brought up Moses who heard God tell to him "I AM I AM" has sent you, and now Jesus tells them "I AM I AM the bread of life."

Jesus is the bread of life, he gives himself, his body and blood, given to feed his people for eternal life.

Note that eternal life is not about works that we do, communion isn't contingent upon whether you feel worthy, you deserve to take it, or any such thing. It's not about what you know. It's about believing in Jesus, faith, a gift by the grace of God who works faith, trust, belief, in us. It's not something we do, achieve, earn, get on our own by our own efforts. God works faith in us starting with our baptisms, faith that grows as the result of our good and loving God.

It's God's work, God's action in Holy Communion, God who invites us to receive the body and blood, who gives faith to believe and trust in the words "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." Did you catch earlier when I said it starts with our baptisms? Baptized into Christ, we are alive in Christ, and we feast at the Lord's Supper. It all comes from God who calls, washes, forgives, feeds. We baptize all people, most often infants, a baptism shows that forgiveness of sins is God's work, not ours. God gives the kingdom to an infant who can't comprehend it, who hasn't earned it, and the body and blood of Christ are given to people who don't understand how bread or wine are the body of Christ. We receive it by trust, faith in God and what God has been done for us. Jesus gives us life, he is the bread of life, who gives us life, in baptism, in his Word, in Holy Communion.

Jesus says "this is my body. This is my blood. I am the bread of life." Brothers and sisters, come and taste the bread of God, the true bread from heaven, the bread of life. AMEN