

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel Year B

THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

John 6:24-35

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Bruce K Modahl

24 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.

6:25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here? 26 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. 27 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." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

6:30 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? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 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. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

6:35 *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.*



"So, faith in Jesus is not our work. God works faith in and upon us. It is an altar upon which, like the burnt offerings of old, our will to be righteous is consumed."

Jesus' true miracle lies in how he inevitably brings us face-to-face with our enemies, who have names and lives and families just like us. Here, we can't help but care. And then we break bread with each other—perhaps a meal, or conversation.

DIAGNOSIS: Conspicuous Consumption

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The People Were Hungry, Again

A large crowd followed Jesus across the Sea of Galilee. They followed him up the mountain where he sat with his disciples. It was supper time. The people were hungry. Jesus satisfied their physical hunger with a boy's five barley loaves and two fish. Presumably, the people spent the night on the mountainside. When they woke the next day, they were hungry again. It was time for breakfast. Where was Jesus? They went looking for him. They crossed the sea once again, going to great lengths to find him.

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," Luther says in the Small Catechism, this prayer includes everything we need for our bodies, for our daily life. Moreover, we are to recognize that these things come from God. Isn't this what the crowd was doing?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): They Missed the Sign

In John's Gospel, Jesus' signs connect him to God's promises from Genesis to Malachi. The sign Jesus gave them connected him to the shower of manna God rained on their ancestors in the wilderness. We hear about this in the first reading for this Sunday. Moses told them, "This is the bread the Lord has given you to eat."

Jesus' sign recalls the promises made in Isaiah 25. "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast. He will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces."

The sign they miss is that Jesus is the one who comes to fulfill God's promises. A new day is coming.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): What's Eating You?

If the theologian Werner Elert is correct (and I think he is) what eats at all of us is the sense that we are under judgment. We all have a sense that we are not enough. We want to be right. I don't know about you, but I spend a fair amount of time going over events recent and long ago. I analyze the scenario and argue the case in my favor. After indulging in this poor-baby whining for a while, I tell myself, "Stop it." And I do stop, for a while. And then I start in again.

I am living as if being right depends on me. I'm destined for the dustbin. That is where my being right ends up as well.

PROGNOSIS: Conspicuous Consumption Continued



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Bread of Life

Jesus offers himself to us as the bread of life, satisfying our hunger for righteousness, quenching our thirst to be enough. He accomplishes this in an unexpected way. At the cross, he is consumed by our will to be right. He carries our self-righteous judgment to his grave and leaves it there when he rises to new

life. The tree of death becomes the tree of life for us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): The Work of God

The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So, faith in Jesus is not our work. God works faith in and upon us. It is an altar upon which, like the burnt offerings of old, our will to be righteous is consumed.

God reminds us of his work every time we dip our fingers in the baptismal font, where God traded our sins for Jesus' righteousness. God strengthens this faith in us every time we approach the altar to consume the body and blood of Christ.

I keep singing a lyric from "Across the Border," by Bruce Springsteen. Listen to the version sung by Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris.

*For what are we
Without hope in our hearts
That someday we'll drink from God's blessed waters
And eat the fruit from the vine
I know love and fortune will be mine
Somewhere across the border.*

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): A Consumptive Life

What does life look like for those of us with hope in our hearts? At the risk of riding this metaphor too far, it looks consumptive. This is not the tubercular kind, but consumptive, as in filled with blessings and grace.

Dear reader, no doubt you can give witness to the specifics of such a life. There are many ways people live out their lives filled with hope. The specific example that comes to my mind is comprised of a double handful of friends who weekly travel just a few miles to a church placed a world away from their own. It is just a few miles from Grace, River Forest, to Harmony Church in the Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago. They gather with members of Harmony in the undercroft of their church. These good

Harmony people have the equivalent of five loaves and two fish. By God's grace the undercroft is filled with enough food to feed the multitude of hungry families in the neighborhood. As they meet the physical hunger of the people in that place, they give witness to that day God has prepared for us, when we'll drink from God's blessed water and eat the fruit from the vine.