

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

John 6:24-35

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Analysis by Norb E. Kabelitz

24When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were [beside the sea], they themselves got into boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26Jesus 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." 28Then 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." 30So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe in you? What work are you performing? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32Then 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. 33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35Jesus 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."

Prologue: In the text's move from the bread of earth to the bread of heaven, one should not accuse John of "spiritualizing" the gospel and ignoring human need. Check out John 6:5 and James 2:15-16. That's why "Bread for the World." Feeding the hungry is indeed a good, lively and godly work! While we do not live by bread alone, bread has been consecrated by the signature of God to be the bearer of God's own life zoe (John 6:35). The bread on grocery shelves, in kitchen ovens, or on communion tables point to another form of bread which comes "from above," and gives life (zoe) to the world.

DIAGNOSIS: Hungry for the Bread of Earth

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Looking for the Next Meal*

One might wonder why Jesus risked doing this miracle. Remember the first temptation whereby he might prove his "messianic sonship?" Stones into bread? "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." But before we make any kind of judgment, a hungry crowd needed to be fed: "Give us this day our daily bread!" Isn't that something of what the organization "Bread for the World" is about? While his disciples could not cope with the invitation to feed the crowd, Jesus did. Having done so, the crowd thought him to be "the prophet-king" who was coming into the world and would have "forced" on him such a name and acclaim. Or more realistically were they looking for their next meal? While Jesus fed them out of compassion, their passion was "eating their fill." It becomes evident that "the crowd is following a trail of bread crumbs, not the footsteps of the Messiah" (v. 26).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *"Blind-Sighted" by the "Sign"*

When the crowd found him, Jesus confronts them with a judgment. It really wasn't because of the sign of bread pointing to the signature of God, but the free bread given them yesterday. Easy handout? Or is Jesus being too judgmental? Yet, having experienced a "sign," they do not recognize it as a sign of God but ask for another! Jesus rebukes them for failing to "work for the food that endures which the Son of Man will give you"(v. 27). Might that be the "Word of God" filtered through the Son of Man by which we live? Instead the leaders of the crowd test him, suggesting he give them what Moses did: "manna to eat." When the crowd cites this Scripture to Jesus might they be recalling a Midrashic teaching: "As the first Redeemer brought down manna...so will the last Redeemer cause the manna to come down" (Midr.Qoh. 1:9, Homiletics, Aug. 1997). "If Jesus is the new Moses, let him make manna!" But Jesus is more than Moses, the Son of Man! Who among them would see THAT in the sign of loaves and fish?" Blind-sided by a full stomach they missed seeing the truth! How often we do the same thing! Who prays "Come Lord Jesus be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed" (knowing it to be "the sign")?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Perishable food=Perishable lives*

When "daily bread" is separated from the God who "gives us our daily bread" the bread we eat has short-lived possibilities and limitations for giving us "life." Bread can indeed sustain biological life and we are commanded to feed the hungry in God's name, but the fact remains, to follow mere bread crumbs is to follow perishable food and a perishable life. "Man does not live!"

PROGNOSIS: Gifted and Blessed with the "True" Bread of Heaven

Step 4: Initial Prognosis : *Heaven's "Bread" Gives Life to the*

World

The Father has given the “Son of Man” as God’s bread, and gifts us with the Word of Life that is life indeed. That Jesus “gave thanks” and distributed the bread (and also the fish) suggests a Eucharistic banquet that feeds on the Word of God in Jesus which “comes down from heaven, fleshed among us.” While none could have known how “fish” (ichthus) would become an acrostic “sign” of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, the “sign” embodies the Gospel by which we live, the Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. See early Eucharistic Christian symbols that connect with the feeding of the 5,000. That John uses *zoe* for life (vv. 27, 33, 35), and not *bios* suggests that “eternal life” is not an eternal biography based on biology, but has the quality of God’s life based on theology. It has to do not merely with longevity but relationship! “And this is eternal life, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Jesus makes and gives us an exchange, His life, *zoe*, for our *bios*. He has taken into himself our mortal *bios* and gives us his *zoe*. “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life [*zoe*] to the world” (v. 33).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Seeing God’s Signature (Sign)

“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.” This is God’s work “that you believe”, that you trust him sent by the Father (v. 29). He is the “bread of life,” the “Word” by which we live before God. The “Eucharistic meal” of bread and fish became the Eucharistic meal of Jesus who gives us his body as bread and his blood as drink. That is the “sign” Jesus gives us. It has the signature and participation of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (“the Lord and Giver of Life”)!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Give Us This Bread to and for One Another*

We will always be “looking” forward to the next meal, but now also the Eucharistic meal that feeds on who Christ is and how he has made possible to have a new and lively relationship with his Father: “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” It is of great interest and importance that the Eucharist now feeds not only zoe but also bios as leftovers are given in the agape meal to the poor and hungry! May we experience “bread” also as the sign of the “Word,” the bread of life by which we truly live as food for eternal life. It is the sign of the Body of Christ whose death and resurrection becomes for us the Promise of “true life.” Thus we pray, “Come Lord Jesus, be our Guest and may thy gifts to us be blessed!” May our prayer for daily bread also be a sign of the Bread of Life even as we eat the bread in the “Holy Communion.” (See Evangelical Lutheran Worship [ELW] 480 “O Bread of Life from Heaven” and ELW 472 “Eat this bread, drink this cup. ... Come to me and never be hungry. Eat this bread, drink this cup, trust in me and you will not thirst.”)