

Sermon: 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 2011

Text: John 6:25-29, 35: (After the feeding of the five thousand,) Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” ... Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”.

(Theme: Jesus, the bread of life (How to get it?))

Goal: To show that “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” and only through faith we get the Bread of Life and with Him the new way of life and the eternal life.)

Dear Friends

Introduction: In the African tradition, most of the tribes don't have a written record of their stories and tales. But *‘Africans were very good teachers, whose stories often led smoothly to an appropriate moral. Jesus, the Master Teacher, uses a similar approach here as he builds on his feeding of the five thousand people’* (ABC p. 1263) to teach about the one and only way to reach God and to please God: The faith in Jesus, the true Bread of Life.

## **I – The background**

Jesus had fed 5.000 men plus the women and children having only five loaves and two fish. The crowd became amazed with this miracle “*and they began to say, ‘This is the Prophet who is to come into the world’*. *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself*” (John 6:14-15). During the night Jesus went to the other side of the lake, to Capernaum, and the people followed Him. As

they found Him in the synagogue (v. 59), a good dialogue took place between the people and Jesus. Jesus uses the physical help He had given to them when He gave them bread to eat to talk now about their spiritual need and the spiritual bread He had to give them – and has to give us too: He himself, the Bread of Life, sent by the Father to give life to all who believe!

## II – The big question

The people asked Jesus the big and most common question of every human being: “*What must we do to do the works God requires?*” They all had grown up knowing the Law of Moses; but most of them had forgotten God’s gracious promises through Moses and the Prophets. So, they were Law-directed people. “*What must we do?*”

This is the old theological struggle between deeds and faith, between what humankind want to do and what God had already done for us in and through Christ Jesus. This is the division mark between all religions and also between our natural sense and God’s revelation. Every one of us, by nature, wants to do something to pay, to compensate our sins. “*I have done something wrong, my conscience accuses me... I need to do something good to balance my life and to please God.*” **NO!** This is not the right way to repair what we did wrong!

Jesus’ answer to that question, ‘*What must we do to do the works God requires?*’ is: “*The work of God is this: to **believe** in the one He has sent*” (v. 29).

The Africa Bible Commentary has a very nice text about this question and Jesus’ answer. Let me share it with you: “*What works are acceptable to God? If Jesus wanted the crowd to work for the right things, they wanted a list of what these things were. Hence their question, What must we do to do the works God requires?*”

*What works would merit God's favor? But where the crowd thought of 'works', Jesus talked of only one 'work': The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent. He was speaking of a way of life rather than a set of rules to observe. It is a life characterized by the continual exercise of faith in Jesus." (ABC p. 1264)*

But even that work of believing is not **our** work. It is a gift of God, as everything that we receive from Him for our body and for our soul. Martin Luther explained: *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."* (3<sup>rd</sup> Article of the Creed – Small Catechism)

As Jesus had given them from the five loaves and the two fish enough for all to become full, now Jesus is offering them the Bread of Life, - He Himself. Faith is the hand of the beggar that accepts the offer of God.- Humankind has the power to reject it, unfortunately! Blessed is he who believes in the Son of God and accepts God's gift of faith through the work of the Holy Spirit!

### **III – The benefits of faith**

It was not easy for the Jews to change their way of life: from a Moses-Law-directed-life to a Jesus-faith-directed-life. They questioned Jesus again about this. Then Jesus taught them that the bread Moses had given them was temporary, *but "the true bread from heaven... is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* And He declares more: *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."* *'Jesus offers an unfailing opportunity for a spiritually satisfied life. Everything that the Father miraculously provided for their ancestors in the wilderness, He is now providing in the person of Christ.'* (ABC p. 1264).

Only through faith we can receive these benefits. And this faith in Jesus causes a new life in us that pleases God. Everything we do by faith in Jesus is good deeds according to God's will. It's a life of hope; it's a life that looks forward to God's promises; it's a life where we are not walking alone, but Jesus is walking with us every day; and in the hardest and most difficult times of our lives, He takes us in His arms and carries us safely. He gives us bread for this life and for the eternal life. When we have Jesus, we have all we need!

#### **IV – How can we say “Thank You” to God for this all?**

Thinking about all the blessings God is giving us, the Psalmist asks: *“What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits toward me?”* And his answer is: *“I will take the cup of salvation!”* (Psalm 116:12-13). This means: I can do nothing but use what God offers me, receiving blessings over blessings when I go back daily to His Word and receive the Sacrament as often as I can. He offers and gives me the salvation through the Means of Grace and I search the salvation in the Means of Grace. Luther explains in the Third Commandment: *“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”*

**Conclusion:** *“Every Christian enjoys two kinds of life: bodily and spiritual. Truly, we are born (from our parents) and then ‘born again’ (from the Holy Spirit). Logically then, endowed with two kinds of life, a Christian needs two kinds of food or ‘bread’. To be sure, we need bread to sustain our bodily life, a need toward which God is not indifferent, as is evident from the feeding of the 5.000 and from the Lord’s Prayer (Give us today our daily bread). But as Jesus Himself makes clear... we cannot live by bread alone. To sustain our spiritual life, we need ‘the Bread of Life’, Jesus Himself, a life offered through the Means of Grace (God’s Word,*

the Baptism and the Holy Supper) *and received through faith... All the blessings God has given us have this purpose: that we might be on the receiving end of Gods blessings all of our life and all of eternity*” (Series B, pp.197-199). Amen.

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Adapted to reading service, Cape Town, 31 July 2011