

Sermon: 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: John 6:35-51 (v.35)

Theme: The Bread of Life

Goal: Jesus satisfies our spiritual hunger as well as our physical hunger.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: It would be nice never more to go hungry and never more to be thirsty! Water and food are among the most basic needs of each human being. Someone can survive without clothes (in some regions), without a house, without friends... but nobody can survive for a long time without food and water.

As we are celebrating our Thanksgiving Service, we have to find the right balance between the physical supplies that God bestows us, and the spiritual food that He offers and gives us, - as Jesus does in this text.

I – The background

Jesus had fed more than 5000 people, given them bread and fish. Those were looking for Jesus to crown Him as their king. Jesus was like a second Moses for them, who a long time ago had given his people manna and water in the wilderness for 40 years. If it is so, they wouldn't need to work anymore, yet they would have food and water guaranteed for all their lives.

Because of the big need of food and for whatever has to do with our bodily needs, many churches are preaching prosperity. "... *if you are a Christian and member of our church, you will become rich and will have whatever you want...*" These churches are packed with people, whose hope is to become rich and to never more have concerns about what to eat and what to drink. - As we read the Gospels, we have to realize that

this is not the promise of Jesus. Prosperity can follow a faithful Christian; but it is not always so. We know from the Bible and from personal experiences that some very faithful people don't have enough for their daily lives and are always struggling to survive.

If we have enough for our life and for our family, let us be thankful to our God and Father, who “causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). What He gives us is to be shared with our family and with needy people as well.

II – Jesus and the people of His time

It was not easy for Jesus to manage between His power and His goal of ministry. He wanted to help people, but not only to have their daily bread and health. He wanted to lift their eyes up to a higher level and hope. He wanted to give them the Bread that gives eternal life, He Himself. But most of the people were not prepared for this and were not interested in these spiritual blessings. They wanted to fill their stomach and to have a Jewish king!

Jesus tried to explain them that God had a bigger goal for them. Just for this reason He, the Son of God, was sent from heaven to earth to save people from their sins and to guarantee all the resurrection to eternal life. He calls Himself as “the bread that came down from heaven”, sent by the Father to feed His people. What does it mean to eat the bread that came from heaven?

According to the teaching of Jesus in this text, it means: to look to the Son of God and to believe in him. Faith gives life, eternal life. This is the will of God! The will of God is not just to obey some commandments, but is to **believe** in the Son with our whole heart and with our whole mind. It is to rely in Him alone. Having this new relationship with Jesus, a new life will emerge from us, according to the will of God.

Some of the people understood that Jesus was giving His own flesh to be physically eaten by them (cannibalism); and they began to grumble

about Him. Some are too materialistic and cannot see the spiritual thoughts that are behind these words of Jesus. They couldn't receive Jesus by faith, and therefore they criticized Him.

On the other hand, Jesus was very clear when He said: “This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” He was referring to His crucifixion. He was not just “spiritualizing” His words. It was something concrete. The death of Jesus on the cross was not just a drama performed by a hero; but it was a real sacrifice of the Son of God on behalf of each of us. He gave His flesh for us and shed His blood on the cross for us. Nobody could understand this until He rose again from the dead on the third day. Now it was clear to His believers what He meant by saying “He would give His flesh for the life of the world”. Whoever believes in Him, receives forgiveness and eternal life.

III – How do we react to God's blessings?

Jesus is not a private property of someone or of one church. Like bread is to be shared, the Bread of Life has also to be shared. There are many people who are spiritually hungry and thirsty. They are looking for food and for water in several different places, but they are never satisfied. They “pop” from one church to another, reading lots of self-help books, running after the wind. Until they “eat the Bread of Life”, until they believe in Jesus, they will never be satisfied, they will never be quiet and in peace.

We have the Bread of Life in our Bible. We have to offer it to others, so that they might be satisfied as well. This is the task of each Christian.

But we have also the daily bread in abundance in our homes. We know that many have need of it and they struggle every day to get a small portion. Thanksgiving Celebration will remind us to share what we have with those who don't have so much. Our offerings in food, toiletries, money, fruits and vegetables will help our Congolese brothers and sisters to have a better meal this Sunday and the days to come. This cannot happen only once a year, but is happening every month as we bring our

offering to put them in the Luther's Loot. God bless all who are giving regularly, and may God touch the heart of all to be part of this joy of giving.

Conclusion: I cannot miss the opportunity to mention our brother Mike, who passed away last Sunday. Maybe few know the story of his life. He was for a long time apart from the church. But the good seed had been sown in his heart when he was a child. And his wife Carol was always faithful to Jesus and to the church. God worked in Mike's heart with Carol's good example and through the ministry of Pastor Dieter. God's Word found place in his heart again. The faith was renewed and lightened again. Mike reconciled himself with God, and became a faithful member of St. Thomas, where he was warmly welcome. He looked to Jesus, believed in Him and received eternal life. Only good remembrances are in the mind of the family and of his friends. Very seldom had he missed a Bible Study on Wednesday or a Service since he came back to the church. He is a good example to all of us of someone that was called by God to be a follower of Jesus, and who followed Jesus till the presence of the Father in heaven. And Carol told me on Friday that both had decided to give a Thanksgiving Offering this Sunday to help the needy.

May God preserve us in the true faith and give us always the Bread of Life that gives us eternal life in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 12 August 2012