

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

4th August 2024 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:24-35

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Have you ever eaten something that you thought would be good and tasty, that you thought you would really enjoy and feel great afterwards, but that didn't turn out to be the case? Ever had that experience? Maybe it was very recent for you. It could be a craving for some greasy fast food which you really feel like having but there's that little voice inside saying, 'remember how you feel after you eat that stuff.' Or you might be in a bakery and see a big sweet sugary bun or slice, and you think, 'it's ok, it's just a once off. If you're gunna be bad, be really bad', but then for quite a while after that the extreme sugar high you get makes you regret what you've done. A time we can be really faced with a temptation like this is when we go to an all-you-can-eat smorgasbord. What are you going to eat; the good healthy stuff which you can eat every day like bread and vegetables? Or the richer, greasy, sweet foods which you quite rightly normally stay away from but which at a place like this you can go to town on, regardless of how you know you will feel afterwards?

Taking an 'all things in moderation approach' (which my doctor said to me just this week), these occasional bad eating indulgences while they might make us feel a bit uncomfortable for a while, for most of us they don't have long term consequences. But doing what Jesus does in our reading here from John 6 and talking about the things of life and what we see as important in life in the same way we talk about food, how then do we approach the smorgasbord which is life? What do we see as being important in life? Which part of the smorgasbord do we graze from more often? Do we go for the healthy options we know are better for us, and still tasty, or do we head for those which give us the quick and immediate pleasure or high, but which we know we will regret after?

The section you don't normally see people hang around much in an all-you-can-eat restaurant contains things like bread, vegetables, fruit; the healthier options we might think are more every day. In

the smorgasbord of life, we might place in that section worshipping God, staying close to God in prayer and Bible reading, loving and helping others, forgiving people. While in the much more popular section like that which normally contains the greasy and sweet foods, we might put the desire to get more and more money, to own more and more things, to get our own way, having immediate pleasure here and now regardless of the long-term consequences, paying back those we feel have wronged us. Being honest, which section of this smorgasbord do we find ourselves more drawn towards, and which do we find it easiest to leave out so that we have enough room for the things we really want to partake of?

Being focused on the things we need, and the things we want, right here and now. That's what was happening in the interaction between Jesus and a crowd of people in the reading we have here today from John 6. Not long before this Jesus had fed a crowd of 5,000 people with just two fish and five small loaves of bread. The people's immediate earthly needs were satisfied, and at a great price (free!), so naturally they wanted more. While Jesus and the disciples went across the lake the crowd walked right around. They saw Jesus as the magic genie in a bottle who granted their wishes, or perhaps more accurately, as a bottomless bread machine. But while Jesus had supplied their earthly needs, as God does for us, He was trying to point them to something much longer lasting; their relationship with God and eternal life. They wanted a sign so they could believe, but true faith doesn't come from proof. They referred to the Old Testament when God gave their ancestors bread from heaven to satisfy their earthly needs. When Jesus tells them to instead look to the food that gives eternal life, they ask, "What exactly does God want us to do?" (28a).

In focusing on their physical needs here and now, the crowd was missing what was right before them; Jesus, the Bread of Life, sent down from heaven to give us real life both now and for eternity. Their physical needs had been fulfilled, and that was great, but it was all they could now focus on. They couldn't see that the Giver is now the gift, and that through faith in Him Jesus is now offering them food for the full and complete life which lasts forever.

In focusing on their physical needs here and now, the crowd was missing what was right before them. Ring any bells? Sounds a bit like us as we move along the smorgasbord of life, doesn't it? What

‘food’ can we be more readily drawn to; that which is good for us and better long term for us and others, or that which satisfies immediate needs and desires?

Jesus’ answer to the crowd that day is the same message we are given today, ‘I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No one who has faith in me will ever be thirsty.’ (35) Just as God fulfilled the physical needs of the Israelites in the desert, of the crowd with Jesus, and of us today, so also He gives us the opportunity to fulfill our spiritual needs in Him so that we can have the Bread that leads us to full life now and eternal life forever. One of the ways God has done this is by sending Jesus down to us as the Bread of Life. He came down to be one of us, to live the lives we live, to die and rise again for our forgiveness and salvation. Through the Holy Spirit God continues to come down to us in the Bible. In bringing us into His family in Baptism. And in Holy Communion where we really do eat the bread and drink the wine, and with them Jesus’ body and blood, and in these receive assurance of our forgiveness as we are joined with Jesus’ death and sacrifice for us. This is the ‘food’ that doesn’t spoil. The food that brings us to faith and enables us to grow in our faith. The Bread of Life that keeps us in and helps us to grow in our relationship with God.

And what do we receive from eating from this part of the smorgasbord of life? We receive the assurance of God’s love for us, that He is with us in everything we go through. We receive the reminder and assurance that in Jesus our sins are forgiven; that through Jesus coming down and dying for us God wipes away all our sins. We receive the strength we need to forgive others so that our relationships with others can be maintained or restored. Coming to eat the Bread of Life we receive the direction, guidance, call, however you want to say or define it, to live our lives, make decisions, set priorities, in and towards ways which bring glory to God, and are the best (eternally healthiest) for ourselves and others.

Eating this food we receive in faith changes us from the inside out. It can mean that the little voice we might hear before the display of sweet delights in the bakery, now becomes a stronger voice which says to us; ‘God loves you no matter what. God forgives you in all you now do. God is now calling you to live a life of worshipping Him and loving others.’ It can help us to no longer just focus on the immediate physical needs and pleasures, but to really see and partake of what God is offering right in front of us.

And then in a bit of a case of ‘you are what you eat’, we also become bread for others. Not of course that, like Jesus, we are the Bread of Life, but we can be a part of leading others to know Him, to come and ‘eat’ at this part of life’s smorgasbord with us. We do that in showing outwardly, naturally, what it means for us to have this new life. We do it in the witness we give in where we place our priorities – which can be hard. We do it in showing forgiveness and grace when we can; acting in a way towards others which is different to what we often see and experience around us. We do it in how we show, naturally, every day, in what we do, what we say, how we act, the values we live out, and how these things show that by eating the Bread of Life we have been transformed. We even do it when we mess up in doing this, which we know we often will, as we receive and know God’s forgiveness and keep on trying to live and love in the way He calls us to do.

The invitation is here for us all; come and eat the Bread of Life, through which God wants to give us not only what we need in this life, but also His love and forgiveness through our faith which leads to eternal life. Taste and see that the Lord is good, and His love lasts forever. Enjoy the other parts of life’s smorgasbord in a way which is not harmful for us, but most importantly, through God’s Word, through prayer, through worship, always come to the Bread of Life and what we receive through Him each day. Amen.

For Further Discussion/Reflection

- Is there a food you really like to eat, perhaps even sometimes get a craving for, but which leaves you not feeling particularly good afterwards?
- Looking at life as being like a smorgasbord, are there any parts that you are sometimes drawn towards, perhaps find it hard to stay away from, even though you know they are not good for you? Pray for God’s forgiveness in this and for His help to make ‘healthy’ choices.
- Consider how you eat the Bread of Life; in worship, prayer, Bible reading, remembering your Baptism and receiving Holy Communion, sharing God’s love. Reflect on the part these play in your life. Are there some you could give more attention and time to? Some which you maybe ignore way too much? Again, ask for God’s help and guidance in where you focus your time, priorities, and efforts.

Pray: thank God for giving us Jesus as the Bread of Life. Ask for His help to make ‘healthy’ choices as we eat from the smorgasbord of life so we can grow in our faith and life in Him.

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