

## ***“Bread of Life”***

(Exodus 16:2-4; 9-15; John 6:24-35)

In Nineteenth Century China persons who came to church simply because they were hungry for material food were called “rice Christians”. They came, were baptized, fed and remained active members until the rice ran out – until their material needs were no longer being met. In East Germany and Romania, just before the liberation of Eastern Europe, people flocked to churches where the churches manifested courage, and pastors spoke out against Communist regimes. But after the liberation the crowds dispersed and the churches were abandoned.

The crowds that followed Jesus to Capernaum to find Him after He fed the five thousand in the wilderness are like those who see faith and church membership as something they can choose for themselves to use for their own needs to pursue their own interests.

Each of us hunger – for something. However, we live in a society that is in a hurry. Ours is a hasty meal. We want to be fed, and then need to be up again and off, on our way. This is a canteen, not a fine restaurant. It satisfies us – for now. For that reason, we often have folks who suddenly as they came, they are gone. They tasted, enjoyed, and moved on – not because of what we did or did not do – but because their need was met.

Jesus knew that we all have a tendency to put our faith in things that ultimately cannot satisfy the deepest longings of our soul. The only “bread” that can truly satisfy our hunger is the life that God offers us. Indeed, believing is the ‘work for the food that lasts.’ Believing is not easy. Believing takes time, lots of time, trial, testing, trusting, and forgiving, and then doing it all over again. Believing is doing . . . Over, and over, and over, again.

As a child I heard my grandmother and then my mother saying repeatedly, “Anything worth having, you must work for.” Our faith and belief are worth having – therefore we must work to develop our faith and to maintain our faith.

I think we sometimes forget that it is just as important to feed the soul as it is to feed the body. The true bread is for the soul instead of the body. It satisfies the soul’s hunger and keeps it alive. The Father gives it by sending the Son, the true bread of Life. Likewise, sometimes people lose sight of what really matters.

We are accustomed to inviting people into our community of faith for reasons that do not really matter. We invite people to come to worship for “the right kind of worship”, for political correctness, for youth and family ministries, for opportunities to practice missions. We fail to realize that what we really have to offer – the one thing we have to offer that people cannot live without – the thing that people need more than ANYTHING else – IS SOUL FOOD. Soul food lasts forever. Soul food does not change with the changing circumstances of the church. Soul food does not change with the

changing circumstances of the world. Soul food is the food that everyone desires and few really receive. Soul Food is that for which we rejoice, long after our bellies are full of rice, long after our lives know justice in a free society.

The challenge here is to SEE which things perish and which things endure, and to embed ourselves – to abide in, to focus our living on- the things that endure. Because only the things that endure truly satisfy, and only the things that endure bring true life. This is what people seek – that which is life-giving, soul nourishing, joy inciting, pain ending, and disciple making – The Bread of Life comes from God through our faith, trust, and belief in Jesus Christ.

The way to get the bread that comes down from heaven – namely Jesus himself – is to continue coming to Him and continue believing in Him. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Those who come to Him will never be hungry, and those who put their trust in Him will never thirst.

That may be hard for some of you to hear. Perhaps you think you have everything this world has to offer. Maybe you think you have no needs or wants that are not being met – EXCEPT to be transformed by faith in Jesus Christ. You see, we need to be better witnesses. We, the church, have spent most of our time and energy addressing consumers; needs and rewarding the consumer, instead of proclaiming a gospel that offers faith in the only begotten Son, who gave his life for the sins of the world – and who is lifted up so that all who believe in Him have everlasting life. Jesus is the Bread of Life.

There is a hungry world outside these walls who needs to hear the Gospel Message, who seeks SOUL FOOD, who needs YOU to witness to the love and grace of Jesus. Who will feed them? Jesus directs us Feed My Sheep. Amen.