1 August 2021 Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 10 Vienna, VA

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"Come and Get . . . Him!"
Text: John 6:22-35 (Exodus 16:2-15; Ephesians 4:1-16)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

You think Jesus would have been happy. You think Jesus would have been happy that people were coming after Him. You think Jesus would have been happy that people were chasing Him down. When the people woke up the morning after Jesus had fed them, after feeding so many of them with five loaves of bread and two fish, and discovered He was no longer there, they went looking for Him, even sailing across the Sea of Galilee to find Him. That took some effort. And that's a good thing . . . *isn't it?*

Well apparently not. For when they find Jesus, Jesus doesn't seem particularly happy to see them. He doesn't greet them, commend them for coming after Him, praise them for being sheep seeking their shepherd, or speak some other warm and happy words to them. He says (and I paraphrase now): *You came just because you want more free food. Stop it. There's something more important going on here. That food I gave yesterday was a sign. I'm not here just to fill your bellies, but to fill your souls. I'm not here just to provide bread for this life, but for eternal life. For I'm not just a Rabbi, as you call me, but the Son of Man. You came all the way across this Sea for food that perishes - would you have come so far and worked so hard if I hadn't fed you? For just my teaching? You wouldn't have, would you? Yet that's more important. You should be working harder for <u>that</u> food than for food that perishes; food that just leaves you hungry the next day again. Stop it. Repent.*

Think about that . . .

That just chasing after Jesus isn't necessarily a good thing, if you're chasing after Him for the wrong reasons. Yes, Jesus gives good things for this world and life, and He's happy to do it. For when the disciples were handing out the bread and fish, what do you think the look on Jesus 'face was? Happiness? Delight? Joy? Of course! He is the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and loves to do so. He loves giving gifts. But if we love the gifts more than the giver, if we chase after the gifts more than the giver, if our focus is the gifts more than the giver, then those gifts aren't good anymore. Then they've become idols, false gods, what we live for and from. And that's not good at all.

Think about that . . . and take a look at your own life now . . . what are you willing to

"cross the sea" for? And what are you not? If you think about it a bit, you may not like the answers you come up with. It's funny how roads that seem too treacherous to drive to church are quickly braved to go do other things? Why is it that checks can look so big going into the offering and yet be so easily written for other things? How can it be so hard to find time for Scripture and prayer but so easy to find time for television, computer games, Facebook, Twitter, sports, music, and movies? Or how about with the Covid shutdowns last year - why did it take telling folks they couldn't come to church to make them not only want to come to church but insist on coming to church!?

Now, that's not to say we can't do those other things, and more - we can, and there's nothing wrong with them. Our Lord gives us things in this world to enjoy. We don't have to be and shouldn't be monks.

And yet, it's sobering isn't it? And a bit convicting. Thinking about your life and how things *are* sometimes out of whack with us. When we're willing to "cross the sea" for the gifts but not the giver of those gifts? Maybe those examples I mentioned didn't hit home for you, but you have your own, don't you? I do. And you know what they are for you. We do it too. Our sinful nature will always go after and cling to the things of this world - the gifts, rather than the giver. And when it does, as that day in Capernaum, we need to hear Jesus 'rebuke. We need to repent.

Now (to get back to the story) at this point, the people seem willing to do so; to repent. They didn't turn around and go back after Jesus rebukes them - and apparently isn't going to produce more bread - they stay and ask of Him. They want to learn more. *So okay, Jesus. You told us* ***not to work for food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life.*** *How do we do that?* ***What must we do, to be doing the works of God?***

Perhaps the answer they expected, and that we might expect here, is: the Ten Commandments. *What must we do?* The Ten Commandments. Love God, love your neighbor. Pray, read your Bible, go to church, honor your father and mother, don't murder, lead sexually pure and decent lives, don't steal, don't lie, don't covet what your neighbor has, to enrich yourself at his expense. *But no, Jesus doesn't say that.* Because doing those things cannot get you eternal life. Doing those things are good and the way we should live, but they cannot atone for the sins you've already done and which have already produced the death you're going to die. Even if we could somehow begin doing them perfectly now. When it comes to eternal life, they're not the answer.

Rather, Jesus says, ***believe in him whom*** [the Father] ***has sent.*** Or in other words, put your faith not in yourselves and what you can do (we've already seen that!), but in the one who was sent - and not just across a Sea, but across time and space, from heaven to earth - to provide - to gift! - eternal life. Who was sent to do those things you cannot do. Who was sent to forgive sins and conquer death. Put all your chips on Him. If you're going to "cross the sea," cross it to receive these things, these promises, from Him, not for

food that perishes. Not for food that's here today and gone tomorrow.

Okay. ***Show us a sign*** then, they say. You can almost imagine the scene. We don't know how many people were there, but it was a crowd and you know how crowds work - they were probably all shouting different things at different times. And so the guy over here shouts: ***Show us a sign!*** And then another guy yells: Yeah, ***what work do you perform?*** And then from somewhere further back: ***Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness - he gave them bread from heaven to eat.*** The implication being: <u>your</u> bread was *pretty* good, but you just gave us that *earthly* bread you're talking about, food that perishes. That's why we're back for more. If you're talking about *greater* <u>bread</u>, give us a *greater* <u>sign</u>.

Well Jesus really had just done such a sign. The same God who ***rained bread from heaven*** (as we heard in the Old Testament reading from Exodus) is the same God who had just fed the 5,000. A little different procedure, but the same gift, same God. But they were blind. They couldn't see how great that was, or what it meant. They wanted to see something more spectacular in order to believe what Jesus was saying.

Which, again, is a trap so easy for us to fall into, too. This thinking that the more spectacular, the more true. The bigger the better. But it's not always so. In the Epistle from Ephesians, Paul said that ***when Jesus ascended . . . he gave gifts to men.*** Great! We like gifts! So what were those gifts? ***And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.*** *Oh. Hmm. . . .*

And he gave them, these people, Paul goes on to say, ***to equip the saints, to do the work of the ministry, to build up the body of Christ.*** And to do that *how*? Through preaching, and through giving the gifts of baptism and absolution and the Lord's Supper, and through these giving the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. *Oh. Hmm. . . .*

And then Paul adds the goal: so that we may ***no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*** Or in other words, so that we stop "crossing the sea" for the things that really don't matter. That we stop thinking and saying: *Oh. Hmm,* to His gifts and wishing for something more exciting, more spectacular. That we stop chasing so hard after the things that *the world* and maybe our sinful nature say are important and that we *need*, and realize there's <u>*more*</u> our Lord has for us. That really, **what He wants to give us <u>is Himself</u>.**

And that's what Jesus finally then says. ***I am the bread of life.*** I am the one sent from God. I am the one who crossed time and space. I am the one sent to give you eternal life. ***Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.***

That's not just a statement; *that's a promise*. Enjoy the things of this world, yes. But when

you get them and still find there's something missing, that there's a hunger and thirst that all the things of this world are unable to satisfy or quench, *you will find it in Him*. And He comes to give Himself to you. To fill you with Himself. And for far longer than the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness - for an eternity. And the sign He did for that was the sign of Jonah. He was swallowed up not by a fish but by death - your death and mine. And then on the third day rose from that death, spit out by a death that could not hold the perfect and innocent one, to live as the victor over sin, death, grave, and devil forever. ***What sign will you do that we may believe?*** That's the sign. The one who descended from heaven and descended into death is now risen and ascended in life, and because He has, so will you; so will all who are joined to Him.

And so He comes for you again today, filling His Word with His forgiveness, filling this bread and wine with His Body and Blood. That you feed on Him and have the greater gift. That you feed on Him and have not just life, but eternal life.

And if **Moses** were here today, he would proclaim to us gathered here: this ***is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.*** And then **St. Paul** would add, that we may live and ***grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.***

That we grow. Grow in His mercy, grow in His grace, grow in His forgiveness, grow in His life. Grow in prayer, grow in His Word, grow in faith, grow in Him. And grow *together - one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.* Here is the Bread of Life that produces such a life. So if you're going to "cross the sea," cross the sea for this. Imperishable bread for an imperishable life. Come, Jesus says, and feast, on Him. Come, Jesus says, and live. Come, Jesus says. Come! To me. *He's* the gift, given for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.