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Pentecost 11 Vienna, VA

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"Come Feed on the Bread of Life"
Text: John 6:35-51

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

I am holding in my hand a check for ten million dollars. It's true. I'll show you after the service if you want.

I don't remember why I got it. I don't remember what conversation I was having. But when I was at the seminary, a fellow student wrote me this check - for ten millions dollars. A real check, from a real bank, signed and everything.

Of course, I didn't try to cash it! You and I both know that seminarians are poor. They don't give money, we give money to them, to support them. He could write me all the checks in the world, give me all the promises in the world, but he knew, and I knew, he couldn't deliver on them. He knew, and I knew, this check for ten million dollars wasn't even worth the paper it was written on.

Well that's how the Jews heard Jesus. In the Gospel today they heard Jesus say, ***I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*** Yeah, right. There's a lot of people in the world Jesus. And you're saying *whoever* comes to me, which means *all* who come to me, even if it's the whole world. You'll feed them. You'll care for them. You, one of the poorest people in this city. You just gonna write a check for ten million denarii and make it so?

And then Jesus says, ***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*** Again, yeah right, Jesus! You're not only going to give life now, but eternal life, too? Who do you think you are? Moses died, Abraham died, all the great prophets died - your own father died! But you, you came down from heaven, huh? Not from Nazareth, not from Joseph and Mary. And you say you can give the life of heaven. *Really . . .* Well to quote an old movie: Jesus, *your ego's writing checks your body can't cash*.

Except He could. He had built an impressive resume. Not only having just fed the five thousand, but the healings, the exorcisms, the power over nature. He was consistently being challenged, and He consistently met every challenge. His teaching amazed all who heard Him and befuddled those who challenged Him. And now He was doing it again.

Amazing and challenging words. Words the likes of which had never been uttered before. No wonder they had trouble understanding.

As do we. Let's be honest. When what Jesus says challenges what we think, when His words challenge the status quo, when His truth is so different from what the world say is true, when He promises what seems impossible, when He says things like what we heard today, about being the living bread from heaven, about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, we can struggle with that, too. Our sinful nature pushes back, doubts, wonders. And some Christians flat out deny what He said here. It can't be. It can't be true.It just can't be.

So Jesus got push back that day in Capernaum. And by the end of the day, all but the twelve, it seems, left shaking their heads and scratching their heads. It can't be. It can't be true. It just can't be. They knew hunger. They knew thirst. They knew life and death. How could these NOT be? They knew Jesus. They knew His parents. How could He say He came down from heaven? How could He claim God as His Father? And then when they saw Him die on the cross, see? He can't give life. He can't even save His own life.

And then He did. And that impressive resume of His - the Jews were right, it would have meant nothing - had Jesus not risen to life from the dead. That empty tomb and the living body and blood of Jesus makes all the difference in the world. That what He promises - even life after death - He can deliver. And He will deliver. ***Whoever comes to Him will never hunger. Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life***. The manna in the wilderness and the bread and fish that fed the five thousand sustained life *until* death. But the bread of Jesus, the bread from heaven, sustains life *through* death and to life again.

So if you want life, don't go to Moses or to anyone else. Don't go to the Law or to anyone who says: here is the list of things you must do to have eternal life - even if that list is short. The life you need only Jesus can give.

So ***come to Me***, Jesus says. So we do. We come to Him in faith when we repent, when we read and hear His Word, when we bring our children to be baptized, when we come to His Table to eat His Body and drink His Blood. And that's good.

What's not is when we also turn away from Him. When in our weird, sinful, spiritual schizophrenia, we come to Him and turn to Him one moment, and then turn away from Him the next. When we do one thing Sunday mornings and then something else during the week. When we turn to other things that we think will give us life, or the kind of life we think we want or need. When we are swayed away from God's truth by what the world says. And then this: **not just when we're NOT afraid to sin, but when we are afraid NOT to sin.** Let me repeat that: *not just when we're NOT afraid to sin,* and turn away from Jesus, *but when we're afraid NOT to sin.* 'Cause that happens too. When

we're afraid that if I do not sin, if I do not do this thing, if I do not go along, I will lose friends, I will lose this pleaure, I will lose this thing I want, I will lose this life I have worked so hard to achieve.

So you sin, because you're afraid not to. So you sin, because you think your life is in <u>your</u> hands, and forget - or disbelieve - the promises of Jesus. So you sin, and what do you get? This kind of life is like the hurdles in the olympic track competition that maybe you've seen this week . . . except that there is no end to the race and always another hurdle to clear. So you kept your friends . . . *until* the next thing they want you to join them in. You received some pleasure, you got that thing you wanted . . . *until* the next one comes along. You cleared that hurdle and then you see there's another. And another. And another. Always another, until you wear out, fall down, or die. That's what sin is. That's what sin does. It keeps moving the bar, setting up another hurdle, demanding more.

And so, too, with Moses and the Law that the Jews kept looking to to save them - there's no end to that race. There's always another sacrifice. Always more good works to do. Always more prayers to pray. Always striving to have a stronger faith, a greater faith. You're always striving but never arriving. There's no finish line. Because the finish line for eternal life is perfection. And you can't reach that. You've already dropped that baton and been disqualified.

But that Easter morning, that was Jesus clearing the final hurdle - the hurdle of death and finishing the race. A race He didn't need to run, but which He came and ran for us, to get us to the finish line, too. With Him. Therefore the life you need He has for you. So come to ME, Jesus says. Rely on ME. Believe in ME.

And even though sin will always remain part of the Chistian's flesh and life, Jesus sees to it that it does not harm us. Though we stumble, He forgives. Though we turn away from Him, He does not turn away from us. Though we die, yet shall we live. That is His promise. That is His gift. He is *that* kind of bread - that can give that kind of life.

That's why Jesus said: ***Whoever comes to me I will not cast out.*** It's why He DIDN'T say: *whoever doesn't sin* . . . He is greater than that. He came for sinners. And wants sinners to come to Him. The Jews wanted Him to cast out the sinners. They were offended when He hung out with them and ate with them. But He insisted. Because He would NOT cast out any who came to Him. This is why He came. For sinners. For you and me. He came to forgive and give life.

That's His promise. The danger of sin is that turning <u>*to*</u> *it* we turn <u>*away*</u> from Christ. Little by little, turning to sin more and more, and turning to Christ less and less. Drifting away, being seduced, believing falsehood, until we have cast ourselves out of the kingdom, so firmly entrenched in sin we become. And that can even be good looking sin!

Sin isn't always the sin everyone knows is sin - sin can look good. Sin that brings the world's accolades. That you're good, brave, courageous, strong, successful, bold, and more, when really we're broken, fearful sinners in need of life that our sin can't give us.

Come to me, Jesus says. I will. I will give it to you. I will speak it in your ears. I will pour it on your heads. I will put it in your mouths. As often as you come. It will never run out. When you're thirsty, I will give you drink. When you're hungry, I will feed you. When you're dying, I will give you life.

These are spiritual truths, though they spill over into our earthly lives as well. You can't divide the two. What you believe will also effect what you hunger and thirst for in this world and life, where you go, what you do, and where you look. To hear Jesus' words and think only of this world and life - like the Jews who heard Jesus so often did; like so many today so often do, even us, at times - is trying to fit the square peg of Jesus into the round hole of this world. He's concerned for us in this life, yes, *but so much more*.

So that day in the wilderness, He fed them. But He wanted to feed them so much more. He wanted to feed them with Himself. So He uses this miracle, John says, as a ***sign*** pointing to something even greater. So He catechizes them. On the true bread, on the true life, on their true Saviour. That we eat and not die. That we eat and live forever. That we find life and food and drink and forgiveness and hope in Him. For He came from heaven with all these gifts, and say: **FOR YOU**.

So come to me, Jesus said. And you did. You came. You came with your sins, with your fear, with your failures, with all the times you turned away and fell on your face this week, with your weakness, with your doubts, with your troubles, with your brokenness, with your troubled marriage, with your strained friendships, with your disobedience, with all the hurdles you knocked over this week, with your questions about the future, with your worries about your children, with your worries about yourself, with your dissatisfaction, with your confusion, and with everything else you carried in here with you today . . . hungering and thirsting for something more, something better, something you need that you just can't get or do or achieve.

And you've come to the right place. Here is the bread of life. The bread you need for the life you need. Feed on His forgiveness. Feed on His Word. Feed on His promises. Feed on His Body and Blood. And leave knowing that whatever you came in here with stays here and dies here. With Jesus. And you leave with His life and freedom. And that's a check you can take to the bank! For ***whoever comes to me I will never cast out***. And so it really is true, what Jesus said. And it really is true, what the psalmist said, and that we sang in the Introit: ***Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessèd is the man who takes refuge in him!***

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.