

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Seventh Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Not by Bread Alone, but the Word of God

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“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.” And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”” (Mark 8:2–4, ESV)

In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus says, *“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way.”* (v. 2) Think of it, sitting at the feet of Jesus for three days. Three Days, listening to Him preach. Listening to Him proclaim the goodness of God, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Oh, for such followers of Christ today who relish coming to Divine Service to hear the Word of God taught in all its truth purity. But sadly today, in our consumer, hurry up culture, it is a real struggle for people just to sit and listen to the pastor for three minutes, much less three days. It is not uncommon today to hear someone lament, “Oh, come on, don’t you know that I have more important things to do. Don’t you know that my time is precious, I have more to do than just sit here in church for an hour or so.” But these are not the people with Jesus. No, they not only sit patiently and listen for three days, but filled by His Word, they never think of filling their stomachs. So, the question for us today is not whether there is anything that is valued more than hearing the words of Christ. But rather, is there anything that is not valued more than hearing the words of Christ.

The Lord set aside the Sabbath day as a day of rest, but the sabbath rest most seek today is a day of recreation, of entertainment, fun, and idle time to prepare for Monday and the work week ahead. So events such as football, fishing, golf, camping, etc. take precedence over Divine Service, precedence over receiving what God desires to give you, His forgiveness, and the strengthening of your faith through Word and Sacrament ministry. To be sure, people always have an excuse for missing church, but this highlights the question of value. What is of more value to you; what the body craves or what the soul needs?

God says to us in the Third Commandment, *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”* To which we explain God means by this Commandment, that; *“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”* That is, come to church on Sunday morning. Come and hear the Word of the Gospel proclaimed and distributed through the Sacraments. But people complain; the worship structure is too rigid, we want more rhythm in our hymns, we want to be entertained. So, trying to accommodate, trying to please such people, the historic liturgy is jettisoned in favor of a more contemporary or entertaining form, doctrine is watered down, and sermons are tailored to make people feel good. Rather than feed the people God’s Word, modern preachers fill them with valueless fluff. This is the state of many congregations today, filling churches with people whose primary reason for not attending church on Sunday mornings is that they value something more than God’s Word, so, now, when they go to those fluff-filled churches, they can satisfy their values.

Value? How does Jesus describe value? First, He says, ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*** (Matthew 6:19–21, ESV) Then He says, ***“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*** (Matthew 6:25, ESV)

The word translated here as ***“life”*** in this passage is the Greek word, ψυχή which means soul. We are made up of a body and soul. When God formed Adam out of the ground He breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul. This is the way God made you when He made you in His image. He gave you a body and a soul. Even though you were born with a corrupted nature, born dead in your sins and trespasses, God still gave you a body and a soul. This truth should be of great interest to every person on earth.

When St. Paul reminds you, ***“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—”*** (Romans 5:12, ESV) he speaks of sin as the cause of death, that time when your life on this earth comes to an end. But God did not create you to die. No, He created you to live for all eternity. When your heart stops beating and your brain no longer functions, your body dies, but your soul continues to live, it does not die. Scripture teaches the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. Scripture also teaches that not all the immortal and resurrected live in the same place for all eternity. When immortality and resurrection are given to the believer, their resurrected body and soul lives for all eternity in the new heaven and new earth with Jesus and all the saints. But when immortality and resurrection are given to the body and soul of an unbeliever, they will live for all eternity in the bowels of hell with Satan and all his demons. Thus, the death spoken of by St. Paul is an eternal life of torment in hell for unbelievers. This need not be, for God would have you believe in the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus whose death on the Altar of the Cross paid for your sins. This, the Gospel teaches. Thus, to all who believe, He grants eternal life in heaven. But if you value earthly things more than the Word of God, *if you seek bread alone and reject the Word of God*, you will never know the joys of heaven.

To be certain, we need bread, it is food for the body. But we also need food for the soul, and this is the Word of God, especially the Saving Word of the Gospel.

Echoing the words from Deuteronomy, Jesus said, ***“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*** (Matthew 4:4, ESV) Moreover, when we pray the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we ask believing that God will provide all that we need to support this body and life, not only food but a venue for hearing His Word and place for receiving His Sacraments, His Church.

Like the people who gathered for three days to hear our Lord Jesus preach, we gather in His house on Sunday mornings to hear Him preach, to hear His Word through the voice of the pastor. We come to receive the inexhaustible food He offers at the Altar rail, His body and His blood in and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith.

We gather on Sunday mornings in Divine Service cradled in His loving arms, led by His Word which we recite in the liturgy and which we hear from the pulpit. Therein we listen to the Law of God which reveals our sins and our inability to escape the consequence of our sins by our own efforts. We hear St. Paul say that death comes as a consequence of sin, and we hear Him remind us that we cannot escape the consequence of our sins by our efforts, telling us, ***“For by works of***

the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20, ESV)

But we hear more than the Law, we also hear the Gospel, that blessed Saving Word of God which shows us our Savior, that Word which brings us God’s grace and favor through what His Son, Jesus Christ has done to relieve us of the consequence of our sins. Believers are never to be separated from the Saving Word of God. The kingdom of Christ is governed by the firm and simple word of the Gospel. Thus, the entire life and substance of the Church is in the Word of God, especially the Gospel. So, it is not believers who form the substance of the church, it is the Gospel. Trying to find the church in the mutual fellowship of its members or the entertaining value it presents, distorts the Gospel, often turning it into Law. The church is always and only the assembly of sinners cleansed by the Gospel, the Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament ministry.

The Word of God tells you clearly that you are incapable of escaping His wrath; therefore, to rescue you, He graciously sent His only begotten Son to take on the penalty we so richly deserve, the oblivion of hell, by becoming sin in our place, He became our substitute and paid our penalty by His death on the Altar of the Cross, thereby appeasing God’s wrath against us while opening His heart to forgive us. Moreover, it is through the Saving Word of God, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, that we receive this blessed truth and are brought to faith in Christ Jesus. Hearing the Gospel, our hearts are opened by the Holy Spirit that we may believe in the atoning sacrifice of God’s Son, for the forgiveness of our sins and life everlasting. Oh, what could have more value than this? What could draw our attention away from such an eternal message? Nothing other than the world, our flesh, and Satan.

These are the enemies of life eternal in heaven. Old Satan, he is unrelenting in his quest to pull you away from that which would save you from an eternity with him as company. The world, it is always enticing you with its false charms and promises, pulling you away from God’s Word, and your flesh, it is corrupted and alien to God and has been since your birth. Therefore, it seeks the pleasures of this life, uninterested in the true pleasure of life with God. So these three enemies are always seeking to show you value in something other than the Word of God. These three enemies are always leading you to fill your stomach with food that does not last. But if you are to last, you need sustenance that fills your soul, you need the food that comes from heaven, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who rescues you from sin, death, and the devil.

Jesus says, ***“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” (John 6:27, ESV)*** He also says, ***“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35, ESV)*** Furthermore, He says to the Jews and by extension, to us, ***“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:49–51, ESV)*** And finally, He says, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” (John 6:53–58, ESV)*** Clearly God says, it is *Not by Bread Alone, but by the Word of God* that you will have life, and He also says it is His Son, the Word that became flesh who is the food of eternal life.

What is the value of coming to Divine Service each Sunday morning? Here you receive the true Bread of life, our Lord Jesus Christ as you receive His Body and Blood in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Here you hear the Word of God in all its truth and purity calling you to faith, as it strengthens the faith of believers. Here you bask in our Lord's Means of Grace, His Word of the Gospel and His blessed Sacraments, Baptism, Holy Communion, and Absolution all which offer forgiveness of your sins. Is there a more valuable venue on Sunday morning than God's house of prayer and His Christ? I think not. For no other place can you be assured of receiving that which grants you the forgiveness of your sins and life eternal in heaven than the place where you have true communion with the Lord. So no, *it is Not by Bread Alone, but by the Word of God* that you should seek life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.