

2015_08_02 Pentecost 10
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

John 6:22–35

4 part sermon series: "Taste and See that the LORD is Good"

Taste His Bread and See that He is Good

INI

In Jesus name, whose in whose words are spirit and life, who has given himself for the life of the world; grace and peace to you all in him. Amen.

Making bread is hard work. Well, at least it used to be. When you think about what bread meant to this first century crowd – daily bread was their most common food, but it did not come without hard work. From sowing the wheat seed by hand, to facing the uncertainty of the fluctuating Palestinian climate, to harvesting the stalks, to threshing and collecting the wheat grains, to grinding the grain into flour, working the flour into dough, baking the dough into bread – it was no wonder they are pursuing him. They have tasted and seen Jesus turn 5 loaves of bread into enough to feed over 5000 people. In just one prayer, Jesus had provided instant harvest; what would have taken a whole season of wages, labor, time, and good weather, Jesus gave them with just a word of his mouth. No wonder the crowds are pursuing him from all directions. What so many didn't realize, was that this was more than a pursuit of bread, it was a pursuit of God.

We continue our series today in John chapter 6 where Jesus trains our tastebuds to recognize that which truly satisfies. We'll use three examples of different types of thinking to see how the hunger of this world will never be satisfied: we'll consider the industrialist within who imagines we can taste satisfaction through innovations and automations; we'll consider the enthusiast within who imagines that we can taste satisfaction in our feelings and experience; and we'll consider the idealist within who imagines that we can taste satisfaction by improving society. And we pray that in these different ways, God will train our tastebuds to taste that which is truly good – a bread that God provides from heaven; a bread which truly satisfies; so that with psalmist, we can say, "Taste and see that the Lord is good!"

We pickup with John chapter 6, just a day after the feeding of the 5000.

John 6:22–35

²² On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone—²³ however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks—²⁴ when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

²⁸ Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”
²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

³⁰ Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ”

³² Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

This word of the Lord is for you.

We pray, Lord, let us feed on you by faith with thanksgiving. Amen.

1. Against the INDUSTRIALIST within

It is estimated that in 1870 that over 70% of Americans were farmers. Today that percentage is less than 1. What happened? Many would point to the industrial revolution. It used to be that the loaf of bread for which you give thanks came out of your oven, out of your grinding mill, out of your field, out of your hands – and there it sits, the result of your hard work. Now that loaf for which you give thanks might come out of a window, out of your credit account, out of a massive commercial effort – and there it sits, the result of ingenuity and automation. America prides itself on the advancement of technology, innovations, and automation – a pursuit of something that lessens work and increases production. But there must be a warning. Because there is an industrialist within us that imagines he can taste satisfaction through innovations

and automations think that this loaf got here as a result of our earthly ingenuity. And so arises our first figure: **the INDUSTRIALIST within.**

That was just the reason why they were seeking Jesus – the newfound industry he could offer. Here was someone whose prayerful innovation, had produced a harvest worth of bread with absolutely no work. It was automation at its highest efficiency. But they wonder, how did he get here? How can they keep him here? They saw his disciples set out in the boat, but Jesus was not with them. And here he is. They must know. They must know how to find him. They must know his intentions. They must know how to keep him for their own. For Jesus was a living innovation that would change the world. So when they see Jesus again with his disciples on the other side of the sea, they ask the question: “How did you get here?”

When I talk about the industrialist, I’m not talking about a political or economic theory. What I’m talking about is a theological theory that we can find satisfaction in our own works and efforts. I’m talking about the endless pursuit of something easier; keeping Jesus around for our own uses and agenda. It is a pursuit of something better than what God has given us. So the industrialist within us imagines that with enough ingenuity, enough long hours, enough dedication, enough investors and inventors, we can achieve no cost efficiency. It is a pursuit of another god; a god which offers us only bread, only temporary satisfaction, and it will never be enough.

26 Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

The surprising thing about the industrial revolution was that despite all the new automation and new technology that has come along in the last 100 years, it has actually increased the work force; it has led to the need for more office hours, more oversight, renewed regulations, testing and trouble shooting; a pursuit which will never end. No matter how we labor to improve our set of circumstances, no matter how we innovate to solve the problems we face, it will never end. Such a pursuit of God will go on endlessly. There will always be room for improvement; for a new industry; for a better economy. The bread will spoil. Health will grow old; money will run out; clothes will wear out; and the crowds will be hungry again. They were seeking Jesus not because of the signs, but because of the bread.

A sign always points to something bigger and better. The gifts God gives us in this world – whether its the daily bread that the Lord places on your table; the

innovations that make it possible to fill our markets with fruits from all over the world; the jobs that supply us with income – it is not about what is given or what we are doing, but who is giving. The sign was pointing to something more; to someone greater.

And this is what puts to death the industrialist within. For this places us at the feet of him who walks on water and who provides what we need, when we need it. It removes from us the idea that we are in control, that we can innovate our lives into a state of perfection, that we can tell Jesus where he ought to be, and what he ought to be doing. But in the end, when all has grown old, all that will remain is Jesus. The food which has come down from heaven and become flesh. Jesus has been sealed by the Father's anointing, all the miracles were indications that he is the Son of God. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures. So Jesus gives us food that will endure, something that will satisfy our greatest need. Just taste it and see that the Lord is good.

2. Against the ENTHUSIAST within

As the world we live in advances in the pursuit of industry, so it advances in the pursuit of pleasure. In fact, much of what motivates progress, is not what is good, but what feels good. Then comes the idea that if it doesn't feel good, it must not be good. So our tastebuds are taught to try whatever comes along and shape our life philosophy based on how sweet it is to the palate. We have no time for bitter tastes. No time for suffering. No interest in faith. And so arises our next figure: **the ENTHUSIAST within.**

The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek "en" meaning within, and "theos" meaning "god;" in other words, when I talk about "enthusiasm," I am not speaking of the cheerleaders in your local high school. I am talking we are talking about what it means to make judgments based on what feels good, rather than what is good. What I am talking about is "en + theos + ism" – having "a god within."

And it is the enthusiast within, that says, "what must we do to work the work of God?" The crowds were in pursuit of God, but not in the way God wants to be pursued. They are thinking in terms of activism. What can we do to get this food which endures forever? What will it take to make our lives better? To improve our experience? To do what Jesus does? And like a child to sweets, we are longing for just another taste.

An alcoholic once told me that addiction is like an itch. It is an itch that you can't help but scratch. But the more you scratch it, the more it itches. An addict will never be

satisfied. So when our enthusiasm within gets aroused, it seems to only crave more. And so we try to escape the bitterness for something that feels better. Whether it is alcohol, narcotics, gambling, gossip, lust; whether its competition, self-praise, or a positive spiritual experience – our flesh is constantly feeding on feelings. So they ask for a sign: something that God can give us that will taste better than what we have. So we ask for something more tangible – a sign of something better. Manna from heaven. And they say, “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; what will you do for us?”

But Moses did not give them the bread. God did. And it still did not satisfy. They only complained more. The more you scratch it, the more it itches. Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Bread is not the substance of God’s goodness. We must taste the bitterness in order to see the goodness. This is what puts to death the enthusiast within. When we taste the bitterness of Jesus and realize that the pursuit of God within our own efforts and feelings is an endless pursuit. When we taste the bitterness of His suffering, seeing that Jesus has given himself into the bitterness of our sinful pursuits. He felt the agony of hell that he might taste death for everyone.

Jesus is the substance that satisfies. Not just us, but God Himself. He is the bread from heaven. He has given himself to satisfy what God desires, and to crucify what we desire. He is the substance of God’s bread. Life in its fullness restored to the cosmos – the whole world of sinful man reconciled to God. In the midst of bitterness, repentance, suffering, we taste something good. Not through activism; but in passivism – “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” – receiving what comes from above so that your faith and hope have nothing to do with what you do, work, experience; “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” There is nothing more than to simply believe. As the psalm says, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Psalm 34:8)

3. Against the IDEALIST within

So what is your ideal? A capitalist free market, a socialist regulated government –the world is always imagining something better. Always striving to fix what is broken, to improve what is imperfect, and make things what they ought to be. If this or that were changed, we could make something better. The problem is that so often people don’t realize that what they are pursuing is not a social ideal, but it is a pursuit of heaven. And they fail to see what really needs to change in order to reach that ideal. And so arises our last figure: **the IDEALIST within.**

They had taste tested it and seen that there is something better. A world where there is no more hunger. A world where there is no suffering. A world where there is no discord. A world where Jesus is their king. So they thought they had found the ideal leader. The sort of king who could free them from the oppression of the Roman government and create a Messianic kingdom of peace on earth. Then they said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

Creating a utopian society would be great, wouldn't it? Ending hunger, drought, warfare, disease – they are right to say, "Lord give us this bread always." But they are wrong to think that this ideal will be tasted in this world. What must change is everything.

And that change was right in front of them. "I AM the Bread of Life. I am the ideal that God intends for the world. I changes everything. I changes the idealist in you into the idealist in God. I am the end of hunger, I am the end of drought, I am the end of warfare, I am the end of sickness – I am the end of death." And he says, "whoever comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."

We must never rob God of his creative work. It is not up to us to create something new. That is God's work. And He has done it in Jesus. Where Jesus goes, that is where we go. And that is why we are here. Not to pursue God in social programs or political candidates or protest lines. To come to him here in word and sacrament; to come burdened, lacking, missing the ideal that should be found in our own life, seeking righteousness, justice, truth. We come to church to pursue God where God has chosen to be found, to receive the ideal gift: "the Bread of Life."

And here the idealist in us is put to death. He dies on the cross, with all the false notions that it will be up to us to save this world. Here we taste a world that is dying and will perish. And here a new ideal arises, from the grave, in His resurrection – arises the end to all hunger, all warfare, all sickness, all death – Jesus lives. A utopia is born. A new creation is waiting. And we are satisfied at last.

But this does not mean we turn into gloomy pessimist who would just as soon destroy this world than live in it. Instead this creates the greatest idealist. Instead of robbing God of his work, we give thanks for his work. We join his work, by becoming God's loaves in the world – signs that point to something better. But it doesn't have to happen out there in the political or economic world, but right here. In parenting at home; in every labor at work; in volunteer efforts at the church; in the classroom, in citizenship, in our service toward our friends and neighbors; in suffering, in pain, in

loss, in persecution – we are signs, so that those who see would realize there is something better, a taste of God’s goodness that can only be found in Christ Jesus.

Making bread is hard work. And that is good. It is supposed to be. For the curse of sin is ours to bear. Don’t imagine you can automate your way out of it like the industrialist within. Don’t imagine it will always feel good like the enthusiast within. Don’t imagine you can change it into a perfect society like the idealist within. Instead, just taste it. Taste what God has given you and give thanks to Him for Christ Jesus. Then you will pursue God in a way that will satisfy – for in Christ you taste His bread; the end of endless pursuits, and the beginning of endless life. Taste his word and you will see that he is good. Amen.