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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Taste His Grace and See that He is Good

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

John 6:35–51

INI

Grace and peace from God our heavenly Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

In Jesus name, dearly loved children of God,

In a series of lectures to the Missouri Synod seminary in the nineteenth century, C. F. W. Walther captured the grace of God in words that still ring true today. In his first lecture, he describes God's grace with the illustration of a hungry man. Imagine a hungry man; he hasn't eaten for weeks, rags for clothes, gaunt features show him withering away; and there he is beside the road, digging for scraps in the dumpster.

Until a rich man walks by. He stops beside the man. "Come to my house and dine with me." He offers the man a free invitation to a banquet that he is hosting. "Come with me, you who have no money; come and eat freely until your heart is content."

It was manna from heaven. But why? Why had this rich man come? Why would the man not come? Why should the man come? And why should he imagine that tomorrow he will not find himself back in the dumpster? But why? Today we continue our series in John chapter 6, by searching into the questions that concern God's grace. We explore what it means to taste God's grace. And we'll do so in a series of "why" questions: first, "why did Jesus come?" ... then, "why do they not come?" ... then, "why have we come?" ... and finally, "why do we keep going?"

As we continue our series on the Bread of Life, we pray that God would answer these questions by revealing Himself in His word so that we might taste His grace and see that the Lord good.

John 6:35–51

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. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet

do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

⁴¹ The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." ⁴² And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

⁴³ Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

We pray, O Lord, reveal your goodness to us, draw us to you in your word, and let us feed on you by faith with thanksgiving. Amen.

1. Why did he come? ... Taste his grace and see.

It was grace, but it was not enough for them. Think of grace as God's love in action, undeserved and freely given to meet our every need. Jesus has provided bread from heaven – from 5 loaves he has produced enough to meet the needs of over 5000; but it is not enough for them. Rumors have grown along with the crowds and the questions. They expected him elsewhere and are trying to figure out why he has come to Capernaum and what he will do next. They are looking for answers. They are looking for more. And they wonder, why has he come here? But they don't realize how big this question really is. The answer to why Jesus he come to Capernaum, is so much bigger than they are thinking. They are thinking bread, and Jesus is thinking bread of life. The answer is grace. But that answer is unrecognizable to them.

Grace had become unrecognizable. But it didn't start with the crowds in Jesus' day however. It was a long time earlier that God's grace became unrecognizable. And

it was because they thought they deserved something better. They wanted to taste something better. And taste without trust is blind. So she took of the fruit and ate and she gave to her husband and he ate.

Adam and Eve could no longer recognize God's grace. We might call it God's first grace. Grace was what brought life into this world. There was nothing compelling God to create this world or to bless it with the bounty of goodness; food, drink, life – this was love undeserved and freely given to satisfy their every need. This was grace. It should have been all they needed to answer their every question. It should have proven God's love, goodness, trustworthiness. It should have answered the question why? But they wanted to taste something better than what God had given them and God's grace became unrecognizable.

And so God's first grace was destroyed, the life, love, and laughter that was intended for all this world to experience always was destroyed. Sin entered the world and death with sin. And that is why he has come.

The reason why Jesus has come is so much bigger than bread. Food is enough to sustain us for a day, but still more is needed. More is always needed. And when more is not given, what do we do? When God holds back, when he doesn't answer every question, or do things in the way we expect, what is our response? The reason we complain is because we figure, in one way or another, God owes us something better. The necessities of life – food, water, warmth, shelter – these are the things God is supposed to provide. And it doesn't really stop there. We often are not satisfied with just the bare necessities – in fact, we have probably never reached that point at all. Still, we want more. More answers, more solutions, more manna. But the truth is, no matter how much God gives us it will never be enough. The truth is, we are dying in our own complaints. Bread will never be enough to give life.

A second grace was born in the flesh. A second grace which has come to restore the first. "For," he says, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. I have not come to gain more for myself, or even to claim what is rightfully mine. No one has tasted and seen what I have tasted and seen. I alone have tasted the goodness of heaven and I alone have seen the Father. And I alone have given it up to taste this world in its ruined state. To taste hunger, loneliness, depression, and to see with my own eyes the unbelief of a world which can no longer recognize God's first grace. To a world which does not recognize me. The grace of God born of the flesh, and they cannot see me, nor will they let me live. I am the bread of life and the bread which I shall give is my flesh. My own flesh will be the sacrifice for the sins of the world. My own flesh will become the life of the world. In my flesh, I will

restore God's first grace so that all who come to me and believe in me will be saved. I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. Taste and see that the Lord is good." Jesus has come and only grace can answer the question why.

2. Why do they not come? ... Taste his grace and see.

It was grace: God's love in action, undeserved and freely given to meet our every need. The rich man has stopped everything he is doing to help this poor beggar. And he does it in such lavish and free terms, that he would be a fool not to take him up on it. So we wonder, why do they not come?

Jesus has proven that he is the source of all goodness and with a prayer has turned five loaves of bread into enough grace to feed 5000. But they cannot see it for what it is. They see only bread and no grace.

"Why do you murmur among yourselves?" The word for murmur, some translate as "quarrel" or "grumble." The word expresses a sense of despising and complaining. It takes us back to another incidence of God's grace unrecognized.

Last week we considered that Old Testament reading from Exodus. God led the people of Israel out into the desert where he would begin to teach them to rely on him for everything. He brings forth bread from heaven each day, covers the ground with small wafer like cakes, so that each family is fed and the people are provided for. But they want more. They complain. If its not bread, its something else – water, heat, suffering, leadership, odds. They saw only manna, but could not recognized the grace.

And that is because grace leaves us confronted and conflicted. Grace takes away from us what our sinful nature clings to with all its might: control. Grace will not abide with the idea that we deserve anything from God or that God owes us anything. It is an undeserved love, freely given to satisfy our every need. But they see only the carpenter's son.

This is why they do not come. Taste without trust is blind. "But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. This was God's second grace. This was bread from heaven; from God. But they are blinding by the idea that God owes them something better.

The rich man arrives, but how is he dressed, who does he rub shoulders with, where is his mansion. And the hungry man begins to wonder, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

How can he give us bread from heaven?" And they figure the invitation is a fake. They are better left to the scraps.

Therefore Jesus says, "Your father's ate the manna in the wilderness and guess what? They are dead. Bread can only sustain. So your works; your efforts will only get you so far. But there is never enough bread. Your striving after God, after something better will never end, but only leave you dead. You see only bread or lack thereof, and you cannot recognize God's grace. And that is why you do not come."

3. Why do we come?

So why should we be any different? We have seen the same sceptical, selfish, pride in us. We see nothing better with our eyes. There are a million reasons not to believe, why would we be any different? Why do we come to Jesus? The answer: grace. The answer is grace. That is, God's undeserved love, freely given is something that draws us to Jesus even when we are dead, lost, blind, and hopeless.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." There is something so powerful in his invitation that it compels us to come to the banquet. It cannot be reasoned – why us and not them. He comes to us a beggar, not a rich man. He offers us no chariot, no better job, no grand title, no mansion in this world – but simply says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

And that is all we need. A promise. "Come you who are hungry; you who have no money, who can offer me nothing, come, now, and dine with me. And you will never be hungry again."

We come because we see him on the cross as more than a man unjustly killed. We have been taught by God to see him as the riches of God, killed for our justice, and raised from the dead to restore to us the first grace. The promise of what is to come. A glimpse of the last day. And an invitation into the new creation. And that is what keeps us going.

4. Why do we keep going?

The journey is not easy. Just because grace is free does not mean it is easy. We in fact remain beggars, feeding on nothing more than promises. So as we ask ourselves the last question: why do we keep going? We find the answer once again is: grace. And grace is what keeps Christians like Elijah going.

He has come to the brink of doubt and despair, toes to the edge, ready to jump. He thinks back to the events at Mount Carmel. The fire from heaven, the proof that Jehovah is the true God and there is no other; the embarrassment of the false priests of Baal, who were powerless against this sign. The priests of Baal on their knees at the river side, executed for their treason against the true God, Jehovah. He remembers how the exhilaration flowed through him.

But now he finds himself in the middle of no where, sitting under a juniper tree, cowering in fear of Jezebel's order to have him killed. And after all that was done, no one came to his aid, to protect him, for the people were just as afraid as he was. He has come to the brink of doubt and despair, toes to the edge, ready to jump, and he says, "It is enough! Now LORD take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"

No matter what powerful work God would do in your life, to make things easier, or more exciting, or more comfortable, it would never be enough. For there is always a let down. And if we rely on earthly circumstances to sustain us, we may be brought right down to the edge with Elijah. But that is just where grace finds us and gives us what we need – we are hungry, starving, dying, lost in the wilderness, when he comes from heaven to feed us.

God sends a messenger. One commissioned, and entrusted with His word to visit you with something from above. And so he says to Elijah, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." An undeserved love, freely given from heaven satisfies Elijah's need. And God does so for you too. God gives us what we need to go on and he never gives you more than his grace can handle. Not only in the daily bread we eat, but in the One who speaks saying: "And I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus will not lose you. Even in death, he will not lose what he has been given in the waters of baptism. But that does not mean our life will be easy. But in the tests and trials, is when God's grace is uncovered. When we are in the wilderness, wondering why nothing is going right, wondering why no one seems to care, wondering why God does give us something better. That is when an underserved love from the cross, gives us what we need for the journey. The hope that He will raise us up at the last day. A longing gaze toward that day when first grace is restored. And we know we will need it.

We know by the time we get there, we will not deserve to be raised up. How many sins lay ahead. How many moments of struggle, doubt, failure, pain – but there

is Jesus, on the last day, standing, living, and you with him. And he says, "I will raise him up at the last day."

That is why we need not consider ourselves hungry anymore. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Amen.