

Living Bread

7th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity

John 6:30 – 35



30 So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave 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 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

We humans, like all animals, cannot survive without other living beings. That's why we have to kill plants and animals so that we can survive ourselves. Killing is not only painful but is tangible proof that life is finite and that we ourselves, along with everything natural, are finite. This is not how God intended it. God wants life. God wants our life. And God also embedded the will to live deep within our consciousness, so that confronting death is always a crisis, and people ask themselves: "Can we still survive?" and "Is there enough for everyone?" The fact that we humans must kill in order to live stems from the Fall. God himself did not intend it this way. The Fall is the root cause of the cycle of killing in order to live. Because Adam and Eve disregarded God's Word: "Whoever eats from this tree must die," death came. Because of this, we humans must also kill in order to live. Because of this, we humans also have a hunger that can never be satisfied, no matter how much food we have in the fridge or on the shelf. In our sermon today from the Gospel of John, we encounter this human hunger. Jesus' contemporaries had just witnessed the feeding of 5,000 men through a miracle of Jesus. As if all this hadn't happened, they still demanded a sign from Jesus and wanted to discuss further with him. Frankly, the questions of Jesus' contemporaries remain to this day. We all have similar questions. We don't just want a secure job and a bank full of money. We want more. It's not enough to secure our livelihood. We humans need more than that. We also need recognition, love, community. We want to know that we are needed and valued. We want to find meaning in life, especially when life is called into question. For example, where there is war or people become inexplicably ill and die, this question comes to the forefront and is expressed in questions like: "If God really exists, why is there so much suffering?" or "Couldn't he have prevented the war?" or "Couldn't God have prevented the death of a loved one?"

In the conversations between Jesus and his contemporaries about the living bread, the miracle of the bread preceded the conversation. In the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus stands before the crowds and looks up to heaven. He receives the bread from heaven, knowing that it is God who gives everything, and says so, thanking God for the bread. And then the bread doesn't stay with him. He breaks it and distributes it, and in the process, everyone is fed. By standing between the Father and us and distributing bread, Jesus places himself, with his whole being, in our situation. He experiences our hunger, shares our questions, knows what it means that life must be taken in order to survive. He knows of our hunger, he also knows of our many unanswered questions and our doubts. And he testifies to all of this when he distributes ordinary bread to the hungry. This means that he also cares about the things that occupy our hearts and worry us. Thus, he makes it abundantly clear that we can come to him and pray to him with our everyday worries.

But he doesn't just want to give us bread, because that alone isn't enough. For all other animals and for all of creation, life can only exist because God holds his hand over it. It's different with humans. God wants more than just to hold his hand over us. He wants us to look up to him. He wants me to see myself, in my entirety, as a child of God. God wants us, as his children, to receive from him and, as his children, to give to others. When Jesus stands as the giver of bread and thanks God for our daily bread, he draws our attention

to this God who created us and to whom we are aligned and responsible. As a person before God, I understand my life, with all its weaknesses and strengths, as a responsibility before God. This liberates me. For my life can no longer be limited or determined by lack. My life is no longer determined by ever-dwindling resources, but rather, my life is determined by God, and this God frees my life to deal responsibly with myself, with God, and with my neighbor.

Jesus' contemporaries were close to the truth when they spoke of Moses and the manna in the desert. For in the midst of famine, God provided from heaven. They understood that life depends not only on physical conditions like weather and agriculture, but on God, who provides the manna from heaven. And yet they didn't understand. They wanted Jesus so they could have bread. Ultimately, they wanted bread without Jesus. They also wanted bread without God.

Jesus turns everything on its head when he tells them it's not about what he gives, but about what he is. That's why he tells them, "You seek bread? I am the bread of life!" Certainly, that was a disappointment. When they wanted more from Jesus, they didn't just want bread, but for Jesus to solve all their problems once and for all. But then they wouldn't yet be with the Father. Certainly, the Father sent manna from heaven in Moses' time. But now he has sent his living, physical Son from heaven. And that's precisely who they didn't want. But Jesus is the bread of life! Jesus not only shows the way, he is the way. He not only gives the resurrection of life, he is also the resurrection! And in the same way, he not only gives bread, but also is it.

We notice that Jesus' listeners remain confused at this point. But I notice this in ourselves as well. It's easy to say that in Jesus we experience the approachable God. It's just as easy to understand in Jesus the authoritative bringer of peace or the one who shows us the way of the right life. But have we understood the validity and value of this statement, that he is and wants to be the bread? All animals remain alive because God speaks a word. For us humans, his word is not only about us, but to us! This means that in Jesus we recognize God's open heart. And life is not only granted to us, but it is also given to us through Jesus. Just as we cannot live on our own, but need living beings to survive, so too do we need the life of God to live from God and to be his children. God must give up his life so that we can live. And Jesus gives us himself not only in appearance, but really and truly. He is our bread, which we can eat so that we can live. Jesus wants more than a conversation with us and more than a pious worship service. He wants to enter into us so that we can say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." His life, which came from heaven, is more than just a daily grind. Whoever has Christ has life in connection with the Father. Jesus' contemporaries wanted solutions to problems. This is understandable. We, too, would like to have both our major problems in the world and our own personal problems solved immediately. But the solution to these problems is like fast food. It temporarily alleviates hunger, but doesn't solve the fundamental problem. And just like fast food, we become fat and lazy if we only get everything we want. Jesus wants to give us not just fast food, but himself.

Of course, this is difficult for the mind to bear. That's why some people ask mockingly: "How can it be that the Lord's Supper solves our world's problems?" Or "Will my dead child come back to life if I go to the Lord's Supper?" Is that the solution? Jesus' contemporaries didn't want that bread. They preferred "fast food." They preferred something they could see and feel immediately. They wanted to immediately enjoy more power, more money, more fame in this life. God can give us all of this in the twinkling of an eye. But he doesn't. He doesn't do it because these things are neither real bread nor real food. Only the one who came from heaven can give us real bread and real food: Jesus tells us: "I am the living bread!" There is much in our world we could do without. Much more we must do without! We must never do without this living bread. It alone has the power for life! Amen.