

“Broken Bread”

Lenten Mid-Week – Pastor Mike Fieberkorn

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

I.

Diet fads have changed over the years, especially of late, but it is true that for most of the history of the world, bread has been, and really still is, the staple food of society. It's not uncommon to have bread at every meal: toast for breakfast, a sandwich for lunch, and buttered rolls on the dinner table at night. Whether or not you and your family have attempted to cut carbs by eating less bread, the truth is you probably have eaten plenty of it in your life, and you still understand how it stands metaphorically for the basic life-sustaining element that is absolutely necessary for life to continue. That's why the person bringing home the paycheck is called the breadwinner, that's why money is still sometimes called “bread” or “dough.” That's why, when we pray the Lord's Prayer, and ask “give us this day our daily bread,” we know exactly what we are asking for – that God would provide us everything we need for life to continue. We need bread to live.

God's people have long been sustained by their daily bread. God provided manna for the people in the wilderness. Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, means in Hebrew, “house of bread.” Jesus begins His ministry being tempted to turn stones into bread. We need to eat to live. Twice Jesus fed vast crowds by miraculously multiplying the loaves. In the Middle East, there was no such thing as sliced bread. The loaves were large and round, and much too large to be eaten as is, and so every meal began the same way, with the breaking and distributing of bread. First the bread had to be broken. “Breaking bread,” then, was a joyous image. It meant it was time to eat, and to enjoy fellowship with one another, and to celebrate that God had provided once again.

II.

We continue to “break bread” in our own lives, when we partake of God’s providing hand, when we enjoy the sustenance He gives. But when it comes to our daily bread, we face a host of problems. Many are directly tied to eating itself. We live in a culture of abundance, and obesity. We use, and misuse the food God gives us – by eating too much, or too little, or using the wrong kinds of food, or ingesting (or injecting), or swallowing the wrong kinds of things into our bodies. There is a reason one of the seven deadly sins was gluttony. Gluttony is the inability or unwillingness to control our desire. It is the abuse of God’s good gifts. It’s the failure to receive God’s blessings with responsibility, but to instead manipulate and twist God’s good gift into a self-serving object of desire. Gluttony is all about satisfying ourselves – answering the need of our hunger, right now, regardless of the price we have to pay later.

No one knows how much Adam and Eve had to eat that day in the garden under the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But whether they ate a basketful of fruit or just a single bite, it was gluttony that drove their sinful action. They craved what they did not have, and they did what they wanted to satisfy that craving. They reached and took of the object of their desire. “Take and eat” said the serpent, and without thinking, they snatched the fruit and ate what was forbidden. They thoughtlessly indulged their craving. And as they fed their desire, they sinned.

III.

And of course our “daily bread” includes more than physical bread itself. In the Small Catechism we learn what Luther would have us think of when we pray for daily bread. “*What is mean by daily bread?*” asks the Catechism? The answer follows: “*daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.*” I often like to jokingly ask, “Did he leave anything out?”

Daily bread includes all the good things God has given us to provide what we need. But instead of ingesting these gifts with care, gluttony drives our actions time and time again. We continue to indulge. We see something we want, the world says “take and eat” and we ignore God’s clear command, and we partake. Whether or not you, or I, have a problem with physical food, we all have a problem with gluttony. Gluttony is the demand to have what our desires want, and have it now. We forget that God is well aware of what we need to survive each day, but instead of placing our trust in His provision, in his timing, we go after what we want, when we want it, without restraint.

Our breaking of bread is broken. Our partaking in God’s provision is perverted. Our worldly eating is nothing but evil. We take, we eat, and we overeat. Things we should not even touch, much less taste, we devour. These cravings may take the form of physical cravings, but more often take the form of material cravings. We want the new and bigger TV, the updated smart phone, the new car, the bigger house, a nice vacation, a more comfortable retirement. We want it, and we want it right now. And so we take it, even if it means crippling debt, even if it means we rob God of His rightful tithe.

Or maybe the craving is for relationships that God has declared off-limits. You hear God’s command not to lust, but gluttonous desire, egged on by the world’s whisper, “take and eat” causes you to ignore our Father in heaven. And so you indulge. Maybe it’s a friendship at work that’s becoming more than a friendship, in spite of promises you’ve already made to another. Maybe it’s the desire for a fantasized relationship of an ideal lover you lust after on some computer screen. And so you point, you click, and you devour. Maybe it’s the desire for power, and prestige, and status, you have to have it, you crave it, and you stroke your pride, even if it means trampling others in the process.

IV.

We have a problem with our daily bread, all of us. We see, we want, we take, and we eat. And, even though we might pretend we won't, or aren't—make no mistake—we pay the price. Our sin weighs us down. And by our sin, others pay the price as well. How often do we spoil God's good gifts by abusing them? How often do we twist God's beautiful provision into something that is false, and ugly, and shameful? How often do we miss God's provision by our vicious efforts to supply for our own needs in our own ways? How often does our desire for the "good life" lead us away from simple trust in God and His promises that He, not we, will always provide the daily bread we need to support this body and life?

Getting daily bread, breaking bread, consuming bread, enjoying God's blessings in life are profoundly problematic for us. Rightly handling the countless forms of daily bread that make up our lives is something we simply cannot master. It's a challenge that our sinful nature fails at time and time again. Dealing with our daily bread so easily and so often lands us in the midst of deep sin. We don't handle bread very well. Our dealings with our bread in this life are broken – leading to broken lives, and moral failure.

V.

That's why in addition to the consistent and sufficient provision your Maker gives you each day through physical bread, and all other blessings, God also provides another kind of bread. He provides spiritual bread that meets your greatest need of all. God gives you Jesus, the Bread of Life, to partake of in abundance. Because, the truth is, your worst hunger is your desire to be free from the guilt of sin. Your worst starvation, is living in a world where there is a famine of compassion, and you long to experience true and lasting love. And so God the Father in heaven sends you living bread. He sends you His Son.

When Jesus came He said that the only way for anyone to live was to eat his flesh that was meat for the world and to drink His blood which was true drink indeed. These words sound strange in our ears even 2,000 years later. They are stunning and hard words. Those who heard these words in Jesus' day were deeply offended, and many of them just walked away. They couldn't deal with such a remarkable and audacious claim—it was simply too much! “Who can understand this!” they clamored in frustration! Jesus was making an extraordinary claim. He was saying He was the only and only true source of sustenance. The only way a person can hope to thrive in this life or in the life to come is to partake of Him! He is the one essential thing every person needs to survive and grow. He's as necessary and as vital as our daily physical bread. Jesus is saying that instead of feeding our many and frenzied self-satisfying desires, we must feed on the bread that God gives. We must feed on Jesus. You don't need the bread of your cravings, the appetite stirred up by the world saying, “take and eat this... now this... now this...” No, instead, you need the living bread of Jesus who gives eternal life.

But before you eat of the bread of life from heaven, the bread must be broken. And that happens in a literal and very graphic way on Calvary. Jesus is broken. His blood was shed. For you and I, Jesus bled. While we know from Scripture, that like the Passover lamb His bones were left intact, His body was torn, and pierced, and broken. And in this breaking of bread, sin is devoured, and fellowship with the Father is restored. This broken bread gives us life. Every time we hear the words of absolution, we eat this bread of life. Each time Christ comes to you in the Sacrament, you eat the break of life that was broken for you. Each time Christ comes to you with His Word and His gifts and His grace, you take and eat of the bread of life. This happens certainly in the Lord's Supper, but each and every day as well as we enjoy His gifts.

VI.

The broken bread of Jesus is the one and only solution to the broken brokenness of our lives. The problems we have with our gluttonous desires, the problems we have with the handling of our daily bread are beautifully and perfectly answered in Jesus, your Savior, the Bread of Life, broken for you. This does not mean, of course, that once you start eating the Living Bread of Heaven that your sinful desires and cravings will simply vanish, You already know that this is not true. Nor does it mean that your desires will no longer get the best of you or lead you into trouble. And it doesn't even mean that at times you will not feel as if God's provision is too meager. What it does mean to receive the living Bread of Christ is that you have a way out. Your desires need not always conquer and have the last word. Christ has the last Word. And your desires aren't only what's going to drive you. Your life becomes more readily ordered by God's command and your trust in His ability to provide. As your trust increases, so will your contentment with God's provision, in His timing. As you regularly partake of Christ, everything begins to change.

This is the shape of the Christian life – to graciously receive and be faithful stewards of all of God's gifts that sustain and enrich our lives – to daily enjoy feeding on the Bread of Life and be strengthened by His forgiveness. The bread of life was broken for you, and that makes you entirely new. So eat up, as Jesus says, “take and eat,” once more. As often as you eat of it, remember the bread has been broken, and the blessings await you. Go in this peace. Amen.