

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
10th Sunday after Pentecost
5 August 2012
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
John 6:22-35

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

People keep warning me that,
“The older you get the more you forget.”

And I believe it.

But I think there's more to this.
I don't think it's a problem of age.
Everyone forgets.

But when you're older, you're wise enough to admit it.

Today's readings are evidence of our forgetfulness.
No matter how many times we're told that salvation comes to us
by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone, *we forget*.

Our default is always to go back to the ladder—
to climb, rung by rung, all the way to the top.
We want to do something, judge our progress, and have something in the end to show for it.

And perhaps the older we get, the more we're able to admit this constant sin of ours.
Maybe the longer we go the more we'll realize how often we forget.
Jesus has done it all for us.
He continues to work repentance and faith among us.
And He will bring it all to completion on the last day.

But this we forget.
And our ancestors of old forgot too.

They were slaves in Egypt.
Hated, persecuted, and forced to worship all sorts of false gods.

By the hand of Moses and the Word of Yahweh, Israel was redeemed.
They were rescued.
There were signs, miracles of deliverance:
gnats and flies and frogs,
hail and darkness and boils,
and blood—lots of blood—rivers of blood, doorposts of blood.

And if that weren't enough, the sea was parted, and they walked through on dry ground.
The enemy was defeated.
The captives He lead captive away.
They were free.

But they weren't happy. Their bellies weren't full anymore.

So today's OT reading begins:

“And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness...

‘Would that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” (Exod 16:2)

How quickly we forget.

But our Lord doesn't.

He doesn't forget His mercy.

He doesn't forget to save and redeem us over and over again.

He doesn't forget to provide all that we need for this body and life.

And so He fed these grumbling Israelite ancestors of ours.

“And in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people saw it, they said, ‘What is it?’ For they didn't know what it was. And Moses said, ‘It's the bread that Yahweh has given you to eat.’”

(Exod 16:13-15)

Two weeks ago we saw a similar feeding:

a miraculous feeding,

a feeding of 5,000 on five loaves and two fish.

All ate and were satisfied—the bellies had been filled.

But **“the very next day,”** today's Gospel says, the crowd went again **“to the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks”** (Jn 6:22-23).

The Greek literally says, *“the place where they ate the Lord's Eucharistic bread.”*

But He wasn't there.

So this hungry mob got in the boats and went looking for Jesus.

And like the Israelites of Old, they crossed the sea and grumbled against the Lord saying,

“When did you get here?”

Or more pointedly, **“Why'd you leave us? Where's the bread?”**

The crowd whose bellies were full the day before are now empty and hungry and wanting more.

So they came searching for Jesus to get a little more bread, another meal, a full stomach.

But Jesus doesn't want to just satisfy the belly.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor 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.” (Jn 6:26-27)

How often do we do the same?

How often do we seek Jesus for the sake of our belly, our wants and desires?

While they sought Jesus for bread, a meal; what do you seek?

Do you come to Jesus and His Church to feel good? For a good time? For entertainment?

Do you look for friendship or the latest news?

Are you here to give back to God? To show your worth? To put in your time?

Or because you told yourself you'd be better at this?

It's very easy to seek Jesus for the sake of our bellies, our wants, our felt needs.

But Jesus won't have it.

He doesn't want to merely satisfy the stomach or your pious desires;

He wants to satisfy your soul.

But the crowds don't get it; and we're just as quick to forget.

They bring out the ladder.

They forget that God wants to be known for His gifts, for His grace. So they ask,

“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” (Jn 6:28)

They've got it all wrong!

They ask a law question: what *they* can do, how *they* can climb and do the works of God.

But Jesus again turns it all around:

“The Work of God is this: that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (Jn 6:29).

Not your work, but His.

Not your going up the ladder, but His coming down.

It's not what you do for God that counts; but what He does for you.

The slaves in Egypt weren't given an escape plan.

No tools of rebellion or a manual to overthrow the enemy; and they didn't make any of their own.

They were rescued.

God came from the outside to them.

And so He has also done for you.

He has come to you from the outside, from heaven above to earth below.

This Jesus has taken on flesh and blood,

entered the fortress of Satan, bound the strongman and destroyed the army of the demons.

He has rescued us captives here below, leading us captive with Him to the Father (Eph 4:8).

It's all His work, His doing, His rescuing and His saving.

But we keep forgetting.

And because we keep forgetting—

because we keep trying to fill our bellies with bread that perishes—

He keeps calling us back to Him and His work for us.

And then He feeds us.

He gives us the bread from heaven.

Not just the manna of old, which miraculously filled the bellies of our ancestors.

And not just the bread of thanksgiving that miraculously fed the 5,000.

But **“the true bread of heaven:**

He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”—

Jesus Christ Himself.

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (Jn 6:35)

This bread, this Eucharistic bread, this heavenly Manna, is the body of Jesus Himself.

He comes to us. Giving Himself for us.

He rescues and saves; He crushes Satan and leads us through the water on dry ground.

He baptizes and forgives; He dies and rises.

And He does it all *for you!*

This is the bread of heaven.

It feeds us even when our bellies are empty and our friends are gone and the world is against us.

This is what He gives to satisfy not just your stomach, but your soul.

And so we join the crowds and pray,

“Sir, give us this bread always.” (Jn 6:34)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit