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11th Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
John 6:35-51

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

Our Heavenly Father wants to be known for His gifts.
A more Lutheran way of saying this is that He wants to be known for His grace.

Grace is the language of gift.
It's free. It's not coerced. There's no force or necessity or fear.
Our Father gives; and He gives freely, joyfully, *graciously*.

But that's not how we want it.

Gifts are often a burden to us.
There's something about Christmas time that we dread.
It's getting a gift from someone and knowing we now need to get them something back.
Or better. Or bigger. Or more thoughtful. Or more expensive.

Gifts always seem to come with strings attached.
There's always the fine print.
There's always a catch.
Gifts never seem free, or joyous.
They're a burden. They require our work, our effort, our response.

And so we'd much prefer the Heavenly Father not to be known for His gifts and His giving,
but for His requiring and His law.

At least when there are laws and requirements, then there's a known and agreed amount of work.
I know what I'm in for.
I know that if I want to get to the next level that's what it takes, and I can take it or leave it.
There's no small print, no hidden agendas.
With the Law it's quite clear: you give me this and I'll give you that. No surprises.

And that's the sort of God we want.
We want that God because He's distant and easy and understandable.
He tells us what He expects; and we know that He'll give to us a return of whatever we give Him.
There's no grey area. No spontaneity. No closeness. No love.
Just me doing my thing the way I want to do it, knowing what I'll get in return.
And Him acting accordingly.
Gifts make us uncomfortable.
We haven't earned them. So they shouldn't be there.
Simple as that.

We are by our fallen nature curved in on ourselves.
And we expect the same of God.

But that's not how God wants to be known.
 It's by giving gifts that He wants to be known.
 It's by His self-giving, being curved outward, away from Himself and toward us.
 God wants to be known by His closeness, by His joining Himself freely to us, *by grace alone*.

Today's Gospel is all about gifts. All about His coming to us. All about Grace.
 And so it's all about God: who He is, what He's like, and what He wants to do for you.

Just listen for the language of His coming and giving throughout this section of John's Gospel:
"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." (John 6:37-40)

And again,

"I am the bread that came down from heaven..." (6:41)

And,

"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (6:50-51)

He gives and He comes so that you would come and receive and believe in Him.

But again, when we hear this, we want the Law.
 We want to know how *we* can come to Christ. What *we* need to do, a map *we* can follow.
 But even your coming to Christ must be by grace, by gift, by *Him*—not *you*.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (6:44)

This is a hard teaching.
 It goes against every fiber of our being.
 It deprives us of everything.
 It strips us bare of every effort, every pious thought, every work of love and service.
 It takes me out of the picture.

That is to say, You cannot know God. You can't get to Him. You can't meet Him or think of Him or imagine Him. You can't pray to Him. You can't call upon Him. You can't find Him.
 And you can't even try to make things right with Him.

You cannot come; you cannot believe.

"No one," that is, not a single soul, not a child, not an adult, not the wise, not the poor, not the rich, not the fool, not the kind.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

We must leave everything out: our success, our pride, our service, our love.

We must not speak a single word of us: no achievement, no glory, no recognition, no award.
Once we're emptied of all that we might cling to within ourselves, then we can finally ask,
"Then what?" "How?"

And that's when God is at His best.
That's when He's most giver of all:
when you've got nothing and He has everything, and all He wants to do is give.

When you can't come to Him and you finally come to grips with it, then the Father draws you in.
He comes to you.
He sends His Holy Spirit, calls you by the Gospel, and gives you that free and gracious gift of
your forgiveness in Christ Jesus alone.
He takes what was hung on the cross, the flesh and blood of the only Son of God, and He gives it
to you.

He invites you to come and eat of this life-giving bread.
Feast on this Christ.

"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat it and not die." (6:50)

Jesus says,
**"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will
live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." (6:51)**

He comes to you, speaks well of you, offers His life for you, and frees you from all that curves
you in on yourself.

He promises life, eternal life, forever-life.
And it all comes as a gift.
Without coercion. Without force. Without fear.
Without paybacks, fine print, or guilt.

When He comes to you with His body and His blood in this bread and this wine, He comes to
you by grace alone.

And this grace alone creates faith alone.
And this faith and grace alone are always in Christ Jesus alone.

And when that's the case, then His coming to you is followed by you coming to Him, back to the
Father, not being lost, but being raised on the last day.

Everything He does and all that He is can finally be seen and confessed and received as a gift.
Because that's God: the gift-giver, the Lord, gracious and merciful.
And it's all for you.

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