

## “Bread of Death, Bread of Life”

Mark 8:1-9

Trinity 7

July 25-26, 2009

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bread is one of the most common foods there is. Bread is a basic staple of life. And yet we sometimes forget that the eating of bread is a result of our fall into sin. For God spoke this curse to Adam and to all his descendants, **“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.”**

There was no bread in paradise. Before the Fall Adam and Eve simply ate the fruit of the trees and the vegetation which God had freely given, and which they were given to tend to. Without any burdensome labor on their part, God provided to them all that they needed to sustain their lives. There was no exhausting tilling of the fields or grinding the wheat or kneading and baking as with bread. Rather, food was given to them in abundance as a gracious gift from their Creator.

But through the temptation of the devil, that all changed. Adam and Eve rebelled against God by reaching out for the one food that the Lord had not given them to eat, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They wanted to do things their own way, be in charge of their own lives, become their own gods. The devil promised them great things, but that promise turned out to be a lie. Instead of gaining something, they ended up losing their life with God and were left empty and famished.

We, too, know the temptation to reach for that which God has not given, to consume the things and the philosophies of this world and to trust in them to bring us happiness and contentment. Satan wants your spiritual diet to consist of satisfying your own desires, focusing not on the Lord and His words but on the pleasures and the honors of this temporal, passing world. To appease your spiritual hunger, the devil tries to sell you junk food. He hisses in your ear, **“If you would just get that bigger and better and newer stuff, if you would just spend more time on entertainment and recreation, if you would just buy in to the self-help spirituality of our culture, why then you would get where you want to be; then you would be fulfilled.”** But the devil is a liar. He offers nothing of substance, nothing that lasts, like cotton candy that melts away in the rain. The more we feed on such things, the more empty and famished we will become. None of these things can truly satisfy the gnawing hunger of the soul.

And the eating of bread is meant to serve as a reminder of that. Every time we have a dinner roll or a biscuit or a sandwich, we should remember that we're no longer in paradise. We're in a fallen, desert world that is vastly different from what God first made. Romans 8 says that all creation groans under sin's curse and is in bondage to decay. Weeds and thistles infest the ground. Children are brought forth in pain. There is sickness and hardship, harsh weather and

earthquakes. We can sometimes come up with temporary solutions to these problems with technology or medical advancements. But in the end, we are all given to eat the bread of death.

However, into this barren world breaks the very Son of God Himself to save you. Where is Jesus in the Gospel? He is in the wilderness with a multitude of people who have nothing to eat, those who are feeling the effects of the curse very concretely. You see, Christ took on your human flesh and blood and put Himself smack dab into the middle of this fallen world in order to rescue you and raise you up. Man's sin turned the world from paradise into a bleak and harsh place, and so Jesus entered into that bleakness and harshness as a true man in order that He might undo the curse on creation and restore you to paradise.

Jesus said, **“I have compassion on the multitudes.”** That word, **“compassion,”** in Greek has to do with the deepest possible empathy and feeling. So fully does Jesus empathize with you and feel for you that He went so far as to make your problems His problems. Jesus cares not only for the spiritual but also the physical welfare of these people. He doesn't want them to faint on the way. Jesus feels for what happens with your bodies. He knows what you're going through. In His great mercy Jesus came into the world to suffer with you and to suffer for you in order to take your suffering away forever. He made Himself a part of your blood and sweat and tears in order to redeem your bodies and souls and renew the fallen creation in which you live.

You can begin to see that taking place already in this miracle of the feeding of the 4000. The curse on Adam had been, **“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.”** But here the second Adam, Jesus, reverses the curse and produces bread in abundance apart from any sweaty or tiring labor. In this moment He restores the bounty of the Garden of Eden, where food is received in overflowing measure from the gracious hand of God. Here you see God the Son beginning to break the curse of decay and death and overcome the fall into sin. You see a small glimpse of how it was in the beginning and how it will be even more so in the new creation of the age to come.

Jesus would complete His work of undoing the fall and breaking the power of the curse on the cross. The wages of sin is death; and so Jesus took those wages you had coming and died your death for you. Sin's deathly curse was broken and undone in the body of Christ the crucified. And therefore, because of Jesus' sacrifice, the gift of life now flows to you and to all who believe in Him. For if sin has been undone, so also are the wages of sin undone. Death and hell have been taken away from you through the cross. You have been released to a new life, free and full, through the resurrection of Jesus.

That's why it's important to pay attention to the fact that it was on the third day that this miracle was performed in the Gospel. It is a tradition in the church to fast beginning on Good Friday in observance of our Lord's holy death and burial. But then the fast is broken on Easter, the third day, to partake in the feast of the living and resurrected Christ. Even so, week by week throughout the year we fast in spirit with Jesus, bearing His cross in our daily callings in this wilderness world. But then the fast is broken on the third day, that is, in divine service, as we feast on the living Bread from heaven.

Jesus took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to His disciples to set before the people. In the same way still today, Jesus speaks His words of thanks and consecration, and His ministers distribute the blessed Sacrament of the Altar. The seven loaves were multiplied to feed and fully satisfy 4000 people. In the same way still today, Jesus uses seemingly insufficient bread to multiply His grace and feed and fully satisfy the church with His very life-giving body. Jesus said, **“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.”** And in wine He gives His cleansing blood for your forgiveness, that all those who believe in Him may never thirst.

When all had eaten there was more left over than when they started. Seven small loaves became seven large baskets. So it is that the Lord's love and compassion cannot be exhausted; it never runs out. There is no sin of yours so great that His multiplying mercy cannot overcome it. In fact, not only does Jesus overcome it, He makes things better than before. The seven loaves stand for the seven days of creation. The seven large baskets stand for the even greater creation to come at Christ's return. Not only is the Lord restoring you to the deathless perfection of Eden, He is exalting you to a status and a state even greater and better than Adam and Eve. The place being prepared for us in heaven surpasses even the Paradise of Eden. For by sharing fully in our humanity, Christ has lifted us up to the very throne and glory of God.

And all this He has done by turning the curse into a blessing. He takes the things that once were signs of death and makes them signs of life for us. The deathly curse of the cross is now for us the thing which brings the blessing of life. And the curse of bread is now for us the thing which brings the blessed body of Christ in the Sacrament. Our Lord turns evil for good to redeem us.

So now, as we eat the daily bread that God provides, be it the dinner roll or biscuit or sandwich, we are reminded not only of the fall into sin but especially of Christ the living Bread who has undone the fall into sin and broken the curse. Though man ate of the tree that brought death, there is now the tree of life, the cross, from which he may eat and never die, never to be separated from God and His goodness again.

In Christ, there is no sweating to work your way into God's favor, no wages or merits to be earned from the Father. There is only the gift of life in His Son. As you receive this living bread that came down from heaven, you are being given a taste of paradise. For heaven is where Christ is, and Christ is here for you. **“The poor shall eat and be satisfied.” “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him.”**

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.