

Why Are You Here?

John 6:25-40

Okay, so why are you here? Let's face it – there are lots of other things we could all be doing on a Sunday morning. There are plenty of chores to keep us busy – yardwork and housework to do, animals to take care of. There are friends who can be visited, bridge and golf that can be played, and TV that can be watched. So, why spend an hour sitting still in a quiet room, singing songs and hearing someone read and talk about a book written some 2000 years ago?

Those are some of the things that people outside the church wonder about. They often view the Christian faith as beside the point, at best a quaint relic of an earlier time, and at worst an attempt to impose primitive values on everyone else. But in any event, they are convinced that the stuff we do in this room doesn't have anything to do with the modern world, the real world.

And that's probably why most non-Christians think that the most important thing the Church should do is meeting people's basic needs – you know, starting soup kitchens and clothes closets, repairing homes for folks who can't afford it or who aren't strong enough to do the work themselves. Mother Theresa – that's their idea of a real Christian. Someone who stands up for traditional marriage or against abortion – not so much. Providing flood relief – that's real ministry. Teaching all this stuff about Jesus – well, that just doesn't make any sense to them at all.

And you know, the crowd that gathered around Jesus in today's passage wasn't really that different. The previous day, He had done an amazing miracle, feeding 5000 families by multiplying five dinner rolls and a couple of sardines. He had provided so much food that they all had some leftover – in fact, there were so many leftovers that each one of the 12 waiters, the disciples, got a whole basketful to take home. In other words, Jesus was doing exactly the sort of thing that most non-Christians think the Church should do – meeting people's physical needs.

And that's precisely why they had gathered around Jesus in the first place. John 6:2 makes it plain that the multitude “followed him because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased,” – in other words, they wanted Him to heal them and feed them physically. Jesus Himself pointed this out in verse 26 – the only reason they sought Him, the only reason they wanted to be with Him was because they had eaten physical bread and their bodies had been physically satisfied.

Isn't that at least part of why we're here today? Don't we also tend to focus on the things we can get from Jesus? Aren't our prayers filled with requests for healing for the sick? Don't we ask Jesus to provide for us, if not in such a direct and miraculous way, then at least by giving us profitable employment or comfortable retirement? In short, most of the time, isn't our focus pretty much on the things of this world?

If so, then the food on this table should be a helpful corrective. For let's face it – no one is going to feel like skipping lunch because of a sip of juice and a bite of bread. No, what we consume here isn't even enough for an appetizer. In short, there's no practical, physical, bodily reason to come to this table, even as there's not really any worldly reason for us to spend an hour in this room on a Sunday morning, singing songs and listening to a lecture.

And that's the truth which Jesus was trying to get the crowd to understand in today's passage. All they could think about was where their next meal was coming from – that's why they dropped that hint in verse 31 about Moses and the manna from Heaven. That's the sort of miracle they wanted Jesus to keep on doing. In fact, that's why verse 15 says that their initial response to the feeding of the 5000 was an attempt to take Jesus "by force to make Him a king." They just wanted the good times in this world to keep on rolling.

But Jesus had, and continues to have, a completely different agenda. To be sure, it's not wrong for Christians to pray for the healing of the sick. It's not wrong for us to feed the poor and clothe the naked and house the homeless. No, all those are great ways to demonstrate the love of God in a concrete way. And it's not wrong for us to pray that God would bless us and our loved ones in material ways either.

But none of those material, physical things, when you get right down to it, are the main point of the Christian life, anymore than the main point of this table is to take the place of lunch. No, the main point of the Christian life is the main message of this table: the spiritual presence of Jesus Himself. Jesus is the true bread which comes down of Heaven. Jesus is the One Who gives true life to the world. Jesus alone can truly satisfy us, not just in this life but for ever and ever.

And why is that? Because only Jesus' perfect sacrifice can pay the debt that all our sins deserve and open the way into the presence of the Father. Because only Jesus' resurrection can guarantee that all His people will also rise from the dead one day. And only knowing that we have eternal life can possibly give meaning to life in this world, a world in which all physical blessings are fleeting, a world in which even the grandest of meals is eventually followed by renewed hunger, a world in which even the most miraculous of healings is only temporary. Only a relationship with Christ, the sort of oneness with Him that we experience spiritually at this table can truly fulfill and satisfy us.

So, how do we receive Christ, this priceless gift? How can we come to this table in the proper way? The crowd asked that question in verse 28. They wanted to know what works they needed to do to please God, and once again they missed the point. So Jesus set them straight in verse 29: the only work any of us can possibly do is simply to believe in Jesus, to trust Jesus to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We must trust Him to pay for our sins with His own blood. We must trust Him to raise us from the dead by His mighty power.

And we can be sure that our trust in Him will not be disappointed because of that most beautiful promise we find in verse 37 – if we come to Jesus in faith, He will not cast us out, not least because we can be sure that it is God the Father who is patiently drawing us to Himself, giving us the ability and the desire to choose Christ ahead of all the things of this world.

So, why are you here this morning? Do you crave a worldly, material blessing from God today? You won't find it here – there's not much earthly good in a sip of juice or a bite of bread, let alone in singing a few songs and hearing a talk on the Bible. But if you desire to be with Jesus, if you want to connect with Him in a deeper, more spiritual way, if you want to be reassured of His welcome and His love for sinners like us – you've come to the right place.