

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The story of Jesus' ministry around the Sea of Galilee continues in our Gospel today. A couple weeks ago, He fed the 5,000. Last week, He walked on the water, meeting the disciples at the boat and accompanying them to shore. If you got out your Bible and turned to John chapter 6, you'd see both of those accounts recorded there, but the last two weeks we preached on these from the parallel accounts from Mark chapter 6. In John's gospel, we learn more about what happened when Jesus got to the other side. That's where we are today.

It's the "*next day*." That's where we pick things up in John 6. The people had seen Jesus put His disciples in the boat, but not get in Himself. The next day they went back to where they had last seen Jesus and were expecting to find Him there. They didn't know about His trek across the water.

Not finding Jesus there, they got into some other boats in search of Jesus, and they found Him around Capernaum. They inquired: "*when did you come here,*" but I really think they were more interested in the how: "How did you get here?" But Jesus didn't answer either of those questions. He had something more important to teach them, for He knew the people's purpose. He knew they were seeking after Him because of the food He had given them. "Here's someone we should make king," they thought. Remember Mark told us that Jesus put His disciples in the boat and went up a mountain to pray (Mark 6:45-46), but John informs us that there was another reason that Jesus "*withdrew ... to the mountain by himself.*" Jesus perceived "*that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king*" (John 6:15).

Isn't that the way with man? Man is almost always more interested in the temporal things than the eternal, more interested in the things of this life — food, clothing, shelter — than with the things of the life to come. And if you understand people according to Abraham Maslow, that might make sense. According to his hierarchy of needs pyramid, a person needs to take care of the physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs before one can move on to self-actualization and transcendence.

In spite of a lack of evidence to support his hierarchy, Maslow's theory still enjoys wide acceptance. I would think that a simple look at the United States, and one could see the flaws in Maslow's theory. I mean, if Maslow were right, then the United States should, right now, be the most religious country in the world, pursuing the transcendence that sits on top of his pyramid. And it should certainly be more religious now than in the past, for consider our country today. We are rich beyond compare. Most people here want for nothing; we are a people living the

richest, most comfortable lives ever in the history of the world. And so, according to Mazlow, most people ought to be seeking the transcendent! Yet, according to polls, more and more people are calling themselves “nones.” They’re uninterested in the transcendent, and, like an addiction, want only to satisfy their basest appetites. Most work hard, but they place their emphasis on gaining things that moth and rust destroy, rather than laying up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-20).

This yearning to accumulate worldly wealth reminds me of Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus: a “*rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day*” (Luke 16:19). Moreover, he cared nothing for the poor, downtrodden Lazarus who sat at his gate. Both men died, and Lazarus was carried by the angels to the bosom of Abraham, but the rich man ended up in torment in Hades. Abraham said to him, “*Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and ... now ... you are in anguish*” (Luke 16:25).

Oh, the folly of worldly riches! “*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,*” Jesus said (Mark 10:23). New York Times columnist Ross Douthat and author of the book *Bad Religion* quotes John Wesley who said similarly, “wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion.”

Indeed, the whole world knows it — “you can’t take it with you” — and yet with what zeal do people work to acquire worldly possessions. And don’t misunderstand. Work is good. Food is good. Shelter is good. Safety is good. But they’re not all there is. They’re not even the most important things; and finally, they are destroyed. As Isaiah, says, the Lord “*brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble*” (Is. 40:23-24). The truth is we confess with Job, and many Christians recall it at death: “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21).

In this vein, Jesus corrects these acolytes and their faulty reason for following Him. “[Y]ou are seeking me ... because you ate your fill of the loaves.” He’s saying, “You are wrongly focused on the things that perish,” saying “*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.*”

In this way, Jesus is showing Himself to be the prophet in the likeness of Moses, who reminded the Israelites of the Lord’s provision in the wilderness — manna and quail — “*that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*” (Deut. 8:3).

Now Jesus is not discouraging work for the food that perishes, nor is He saying that it's possible to work for the food that endures. In fact, Scripture acknowledges that both kinds of food are gifts of God. The Psalmist says, *"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing"* (Ps. 145:15-16). And in our Gospel, Jesus says of the food that endures, *"the Son of Man will give [it] to you."*

Jesus is not discouraging work, for God commends it (1 Thess. 4:11). More than that, through His apostle, God commands it, saying: *"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living."* (1 Thess. 3:10-12). Nevertheless, we acknowledge as we pray, "Lord God, heavenly Father, bless ... these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness ..." (Luther's Table Blessing).

Nor is Jesus saying that you can do the work that earns the food that endures to eternal life. Rather, it is all gift — a Trinitarian gift, for Jesus says that the *"Son of Man"* gives this food, and the Father has put His seal of approval on this giver. And a bit later, Jesus says, *"my Father gives you the true bread from heaven."* And He who came down from heaven, even Jesus, God's Son, is this *"bread of God,"* and He *"gives life to the world."* *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

I hear echoes of St. Paul here, too. *"By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Eph. 2:8-9). And although God does indeed create us unto good works, that we might walk in them, here Jesus is not talking about the works that God has prepared for us to do, but He is speaking of THE work of God on our behalf: our salvation won by Christ and bestowed through faith in Christ whom God sent, God Himself working that faith within us, by giving us the food that endures by water and word and supper.

Yes, the Triune God does the work of salvation for us, the Father sending down from heaven Jesus, the Bread of Life, to be baked in the oven of the cross for us, delivering the world from the clutches of death and the devil, the Spirit now giving us the fruit of this cross in a Supper of Jesus' body in bread and His blood in wine, given that we who have been united with Jesus in a death like His, might be strengthened in our faith to the end, that we also might be united with Him in a resurrection like His, given that we might come to Him at this table where He offers Himself, that we might eat and never hunger, that we might believe and never thirst.

There's no doubt that we need food to survive, but the time horizon for Christians is not just this world. Chase only after the things of this life, and you will most assuredly perish along with all those things you pursued with such fervor. But if you want to live unto eternity, there is a food that endures, the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Receive Him faithfully — in word and supper — and live, giving thanks *“for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. ... He who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever”* (Ps. 137:1, 25). *“He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love”* (Ps. 147:9-11). Yes, “We thank you, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits — for the food that nourishes us today though it perish, and for the Bread of Life that we are about to receive that endures to eternal life — through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen” (Luther's Return of Thanks).

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