

THE WORK GOD REQUIRES IS...

John 6:24-35

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Pastor David R. Clark

Pentecost 11 Sermon

²⁴Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” ²⁸Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” ²⁹Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” ³⁰So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³²Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” ³⁵Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Dear fellow children of Christ,

It was just a picnic lunch: bread and fish. It was a shared experience with the children of Israel in the Wilderness who just went out in the morning and picked up manna to eat. These two groups of people had more than bread in common. They missed the point. They thought the most important part of this was the bread. A free lunch was more important than the awesome power and grace of God.

There are so many blessings, so many gifts from our awesome and gracious God that anyone could be distracted by the “free lunch,” and perhaps even think that as long as we have the “free lunch,” we have what we need. But Jesus shows us there is something far more important than this free lunch!

1. Assess what is temporary. (verses 25-27, 30-33)

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Have you ever felt, “What do I have to do to prove myself?” A harsh boss, a demanding parent, or even a hard coach – we all have been in situations where people are unduly critical. Jesus had just fed 5,000 men, not counting women and children, from

the contents of a little boy's lunch. He had also suddenly appeared on the other side of the Sea of Galilee despite the fact that he wasn't in the boat with his disciples. He was a hero to them, but when he tells them that what they are seeking is not what is most important, they get a little snarky with him. They thrilled at the authority he had to do miracles, but when it comes to spiritual things, they demand a miraculous sign to prove he has the authority to talk this way. So close and yet so far away.

You and I have been so blessed, too, and with far more than bread and fish or even manna. As Christians we recognize that family, job, sports, wealth, fun, new technology, the latest clothing style are all blessings from the Lord. We thrill when Jesus gets our children through grade school, middle school, high school, college, and marriage. Some people would call these blessings the joys of life.

But as much joy as they give us, these are not the goal of life. They are all temporary. The most important part of life is not these gifts but the giver of these gifts. Do you believe that? Here is a test: when Jesus places your spiritual life before these things, what is your reaction? Do you ignore him? Do you just smile and do whatever you think is right? If that is so, isn't that the same as questioning his authority? And if that happens, aren't you saying that the "free lunch" is what is most important to you? If so, you are so close, but so far.

2. Pursue what lasts forever. (verses 28-29, 34-35)

What's more important is pursuing what lasts forever. ²⁸*Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"* ²⁹*Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."...* ³⁴*"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."* ³⁵*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

Maybe you have heard someone describe themselves as living "paycheck to paycheck." It could be low pay and high bills. It could also be high spending. But the greatest problem of living paycheck to paycheck is that it gets people focused only on today. Time sneaks up on them, and suddenly they are unprepared when it's tomorrow.

Unfortunately, that's the way many people live their lives. To the people of Jesus' time, the bread they put in their mouths was the most important thing, even though it was only good for that day. There was something far more important and far more lasting; faith in him and all that means for our daily lives.

God promises us daily bread and he does promise us a feast, but he does not promise us Thanksgiving dinner every day. The feast is the Bread of life. When we eat this Bread, when we believe in him, we are prepared for every difficulty in life. This bread fills us for eternity. All other blessings will pass away, but the Bread of Life, Jesus, is a blessing that lasts for eternity.

This Bread of Life is offered to you every time you are assured that your sins are forgiven or you believe what the Bible says or you remember your baptism or you share in his Supper. When that happens, the promise Jesus makes in Hebrews 13:5 is ours: *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."* The whole world may pass away, but Jesus will always be there for us.

We have so many blessings from God, none of which we have earned. But there is work for us. That work is to believe in the Bread of life. Amen.