

Goal: That the hearers continue to seek to grow mature in their Christian faith.

I would have thought that Jesus would have been happy to have people chasing after Him. The group of more than 5000 woke up that morning after Jesus had fed them with 5 loaves and 2 fish, and when they discovered He was gone, so they went looking for Him, even sailing across the Sea of Galilee to find Him. That's going the extra mile! But, apparently, Jesus doesn't seem particularly happy to see them.

He basically says, *"You came just because you want more free food. Stop it. There's something more important going on here. That food I gave you yesterday was a sign of something greater. I'm not here just to fill your stomachs, I'm here to fill your souls with the bread of eternal life. I'm not just a Rabbi, but I AM the bread of life. You worked so hard and came all the way across the sea for a food that expires. Would you have done that just for my teaching? Probably not. So, you need to repent!"* (***"Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."*** (John 6: 26 – 27) Think about that.

So, chasing after Jesus isn't a good thing, if you have the wrong motives. Sure, Jesus gives us everything we need for life in this world, and He's glad to do it. When the disciples were distributing the bread and fish, I'm sure that Jesus was smiling with joy. I mean, He is the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and He loves giving gifts. But if we love the gifts more than the Giver, if we chase after the gifts more than the Giver, then the gifts aren't good anymore. They've become idols that we live for. Luther compared this crowd who sought after Jesus to lice seeking a scalp. Those tiny bugs love your head and hair because it's a warm place to lay their eggs. They seek you in order to use you.

So, here's a question, what are you willing to cross the sea for? What are you willing to work so hard to chase after? I mean getting up early and going to church seems so much harder than going to the beach or a sporting event. Checks that look so big going into the offering are so easily written for other things. Time that seems in such short supply for Bible study and prayer is given abundantly to computer games, Facebook, Instagram, and music. I'm not saying that those are bad things. They're all gifts from God, but they don't have to be and shouldn't be all that we work so hard to chase after.

Sobering isn't it? Thinking about your life and how things sometimes can get out of balance? When you're willing to cross the sea for the gifts but not for the Giver of

those gifts? We all do it. It's our sinful nature that always clings to the things of this world, the gifts, rather than the giver. And when we do, like those people in Capernaum, we need to hear Jesus' rebuke to repent.

And at this point, the people seemed willing to repent, but they're having a tough time understanding Jesus teaching. They want to learn more. *"Okay, Jesus. You told us not to work for food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life. How do we do that? What must we do, to be doing the works of God? (**"Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?'**) Jesus answered them, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."** So they said to him, **"Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'**" Jesus then said to them, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."** (John 6: 28 – 33)*

They probably expected Jesus to say, *"love God and love your neighbor. Pray, read your Bible, go to church, honor your father and mother, don't murder, lead sexually pure and decent lives, don't steal, don't lie, don't covet what your neighbor has."* But Jesus doesn't say any of that. Because doing those things can't get you eternal life. Doing those things are good and the way that we should live, but they can't atone for the sins. Even if we could somehow begin doing them perfectly, when it comes to eternal life, they're not the answer.

Jesus says, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."** Or in other words, don't put your faith in yourselves and what you can do, but in the One who was sent, not across a Sea, but from heaven to earth, to provide eternal life. Put all your chips on Him. If you're going to cross the sea, cross it to receive these things, His promises, not for food that perishes.

Okay. **"Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?"** Basically Jesus, if you're talking about greater bread, then give us a greater sign. Did they forget what He just did? The same God who rained down bread from heaven back in Exodus is the same God who just fed 5000 plus. Yeah, maybe He did it in a different way, but it was the same gift, the same God. They just couldn't see how great that was, or what it meant. They wanted something more spectacular in order to believe what Jesus was saying.

That is such an easy trap for us to fall into as well? Thinking the more spectacular the more true. The bigger the better. But that's not what Paul told the Ephesians. He said, ***"He ascended... And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."*** (Ephesians 4: 9 – 12) Today we dedicate our teachers and staff of Saint Mark Lutheran School to equip God's saints for works of ministry, relying on God promises through His written word, through Baptism and absolution, through the Lord's Supper and through the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So, what's our goal? Not to become some spectacular, grandiose institution, but, as Paul records, ***"So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*** (Ephesians 4: 14 – 16) In other words, so that we stop crossing the sea for the things that really don't matter and stop chasing so hard after the things that the world and maybe our sinful nature say are important and instead realize that there's more our Lord has for us.

That's why Jesus finally says, (***"Jesus said to them,)"*** ***"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*** (John 6: 35) And that's not just a statement; it's a promise. Enjoy the things of this world, but when you get them and still find there's something missing, that there's a hunger and thirst that they can't satisfy, you'll find it in Jesus. And He comes to give Himself to you. To fill you with Himself, for all eternity. And the sign He did for that was the sign of Jonah. Jesus was swallowed up not by a fish but by death, your death and mine. Then on the third day, He rose, to live as the victor over sin, death, and devil forever. What sign will you do that we may believe? That's the sign. The one who descended in death, has now ascended in life, and because He lives, so will you, who are joined to Him in baptism and in faith.

Today, we gather to feed upon the bread of life, hearing again His promises, His forgiveness, His love, and so that, as Paul puts it, ***"we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."*** (Ephesians 4: 15) That we grow. Grow in His mercy, grow in His grace, grow in His forgiveness, grow in His life. Grow in prayer, grow in His Word, grow in faith, grow into Him. And grow together, one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. He is the Bread of Life that produces such a life. So, if you're going to cross the sea for something, cross the sea for this, imperishable bread for an imperishable life in Jesus. Amen.