

The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2021

Exodus 16:2-15

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:22-35

If you wake up tomorrow morning and can't taste your Egg McMuffin, you pretty much know what the score is. To be sure, losing your taster is serious business at the moment, and I don't want to make too light of the situation we find ourselves in but I do want to make a comparison. Losing your taster is the early warning system of the Wuhan coronavirus. If Grandma Gonzalez's extra hot salsa no longer turns your mouth into a five-alarm fire, then it's time to get tested, procure a prescription of Ivermectin, and tuck yourself away in your bedroom. It's good to have an early warning system. When the sky turned green in Oklahoma and you heard some insistent, overloud siren then you knew to climb into the basement. In remote locations, the Forest Service has built towers where professional lookouts scan the horizon for smokes, signs of fires that could destroy precious resources if not detected early.

You and I know that it is possible for a believer to lose his faith. We all have seen folks walk away from Christ's church, for one thing or another. Martin Luther composed a series of twenty questions for Christians who intend to receive the Sacrament of the Altar. These questions are in your catechism. The last question is a bit of an early warning device, a question designed to take your spiritual temperature and prompt the lethargic to wake up. "What should you do if you are not aware of this need [to receive the Sacrament frequently] and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?" Luther wasn't hesitant to rib the lukewarm. "To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first, he should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood and that he should believe what the Scriptures say about it (here's a hint: it's pretty corrupt). Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble. Third, he will certainly have the devil around him also, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace."

Speaking of the devil, has he been able to distance people from Christ's church during this pandemic? Have Christians been *more* or *less* interested in receiving Christ's body and blood since they heard that a virus might take their life? Luther's spiritual diagnostics are accurate for us all. Let's take me as a representative for us all. I am unholy, in and of myself (not just a little bit). My flesh is fallen. My mind is selfish; my deeds, too often, are selfish. I do not have the ability to conjure up a righteousness of my own within myself; nor can you. We need a righteousness outside of ourselves. This world is filled with temptations. Fallen man's eyes dance with the temptations of the world and faith's taster grows dull. There are no "Spiritual Poison" labels on the trash which the world promotes. So, given all that, do you know what I am? I am overjoyed (overjoyed) to be in Christ's church! Here, with you, I am overjoyed to be fed by the Lord of glory.

After having fed the multitudes with miraculous food, after having fed five thousand plus people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, the crowd want to make Jesus a king... *by force; a bread king* (John 6:15). Jesus removes Himself from that situation and sends the disciples across the sea to Capernaum. In the middle of the night, with the sea darkly moody because of a strong wind, Jesus walks out to them on the water. The disciples were terrified. "I AM; do not be afraid"

(John 6:20). The next day the crowd catches up with Jesus and His disciples. There is one reason they are chasing Him. Jesus exposes their shallow motives. “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (John 6:26).

Have you ever been the only one in the room who doesn't laugh at a joke? You don't laugh, not because you think the joke is unfunny but because you don't get it. Your mind is too slow, or you were distracted at some point or there was a word you didn't quite understand – the only one not laughing, and everyone looks at you and, clearly, you are trying to work it out but... nothing. Obtuse; that is a gentle way of describing us sometimes; simple-minded, stupid, slow, dimwitted, ignorant – those words are less gentle. That describes the people chasing after Jesus in order to fill their belly. They saw the sign, but they didn't get it. It's sad, really.

Jesus begs them to “get it.” “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:27). The kingdom of God was breaking in with all of its glory and the people were interested in the worldly, the mundane, interested merely in filling their belly. There are two kinds of food and Jesus makes a comparison. One perishes. One endures to eternal life. One you have to labor for, by the sweat of your brow. One is impossible to acquire by personal effort. This second food is going to be given to you, given to you by a Singular Individual, given to you by the Son of Man.

The food in your cupboard perishes – and you along with it. The food in your refrigerator perishes – and you along with it. You are mortal. Sin and death surround you. Faithful God tends your biology by sending the rain to water the earth, by ripening the grain, by filling the farmland with harvest fruits... but your biology ends in the same way that every other living thing ends. Eating food of the first sort is wonderful, but it ultimately leads to an appointment with a wooden box. The manna perished (the food which God gave the Israelites after they left Egypt) – one couldn't keep it overnight; but if you did, you were confronted with an ugly mess in the morning. God fed the Israelites. God fed those desert pilgrims with miraculous food – but it perished. He led them out of Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land. He revealed His glory as He fed them, as He gave them manna to eat – but that food perished. Jesus gives you something more, something much more.

We chase the perishable and we lose our taster. Is it not true – our hearts and minds are radically preoccupied with the perishable. The temporal defines our days. The flat, the vapid, the empty, and all things vain; we love that junk. Obtuse – we often miss the divine punchline of eternal life that is right in front of us. Too often, it takes really getting whacked around before we readily dismiss the trappings of this life and look to the deeper things, the permanent, the heavenly, the divine. Have we not been whacked around enough lately? Eating or communing – what fills your mind more? Jesus gave His flesh for the life of the world and now presents Himself as a banquet of salvation. We elevate perishable food to a level never before seen on the face of the planet (all the cooking shows on the tele, people taking pictures of their dinner plate and posting them on Snapchat or Facebook). Did you know that in some places Christ's blood is dispensed in disposable plastic cups?

Jesus saw what was perishing (that's you) and He took your place. The Word became flesh that He might give life to the world (John 6:33). In a very real sense, the Word became flesh that He might be your bread. In order to be your bread, the Son of Man must die. The Son of God gave Himself up unto the horrible death of crucifixion that He might feed you with His life. Jesus rose from the dead and heaven is in His body, in His blood. The Giver of this miraculous food is Himself the food given. Bread from heaven – that is what the Father gives you. The body and blood of Christ the King does not perish. You eat it and you have eternal life. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” (Psalm 34:8).

Who gets to eat this? Kings? The elite, the well-heeled, the fancy people of this earth? Who gets to eat this imperishable food? Sinners get to eat it. People who have behaved miserably, who are selfish in their mind and their behavior, who have hurt others, and those who have themselves been hurt. Who gets to eat this bread? Sinners; people who deserve nothing but death because of their behavior. Christ feeds you and you are forgiven. As you eat His body and drink His blood you eat and drink life (not βίος -- biological life, but ζῶν -- a life that goes well beyond our own, God's life).

Our taster knows how wonderful this food is. Penitent sinners can taste God's grace. The saints of Christ the King can taste forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ's body, Christ's blood. We receive Christ's righteousness in, with, and under that bread and wine. The palate of our faith is alive and we know how precious this food is. God has taken our obtuse minds and enlivened them with the truth, enlivened them by the Holy Spirit, enlivened our obtuse minds with a living trust in Jesus' blessed words: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). What do we say to this? “Sir, give us this bread always” (John 6:34).