

“The Work of God”

The man who had filled their bellies had slipped away. He must have hopped in a boat and sailed away to Capernaum. So off they go in search of Him. When they find Him, Jesus knows what they're thinking. He knows what's in their hearts.

They're all about “the food that perishes” – but Jesus speaks of “the food that endures to eternal life – and that gets their attention. Their response speaks volumes of what they believe. “What must we do, to be doing the works of God.”

Did you catch it, what they believe? The default position for all mankind is that WE have to DO something to get this “food that endures to eternal life.”

Let's apply that to Israel in our OT reading for today. What must they DO for the manna? Well, according to the Lord's Word, they had to go out each day and gather a day's portion – and on the sixth day, twice as much.

The Lord tells them what they are to DO in order that He might “test them” – to see whether “they will walk in my law or not.” Will they listen to what the Lord has to say? Will they believe what He is promising them? And will they DO what He tells them to do? That's the test.

What must I DO to get this manna? What must I DO to be doing the works of God? That sounds ridiculous, and boastful. “Boy, I sure did a good job of picking up those flakes of manna, God must be pleased with me.” Or, “I've chased Jesus down and found Him in Capernaum, God must be impressed with my dedication.”

So likewise, when told about the food that endures to eternal life – to ask, “What must WE DO, to be doing the works of God?” – is to express a faith that trusts in ME, and what I DO – not faith in JESUS.

“What must we do ...?” Jesus tells us. “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” “So Pastor, are you saying that FAITH is the work that I have to DO to get the food that endures to eternal life?”

NO. Faith – believing – is the WORK OF GOD, Jesus says. Faith is a gift from God. Believing, trusting in His promises is the work of God the Holy Spirit in you. The Holy Spirit causes you to believe what God says – and faith receives what God promises and offers.

Another way of saying this is that – FAITH gives credit where credit is due. It gives thanks to God alone – rather than highlighting what you have done. To focus on you and what you have done – steals God’s glory – and worse, like in the OT reading, denies what God HAS done, and even attributes evil to Him.

Rather than faith that looks to Jesus whom the Father has sent – a self-directed and false belief says that God has brought us out into this wilderness to put us to death.

“What must WE DO” misses the point of the work that God is doing. The crowds flocked to Jesus because they’d filled their bellies – “not because you saw the signs” Jesus says. They’d missed the point of what God was doing.

The Feeding of the 5,000 from the 5 loaves and 2 fish are signs that Jesus is the Messiah. The manna given to Israel in the OT taught God’s people to look to Him for Bread from heaven – and specifically, to look for the Savior He had promised to send from heaven.

The signs were to direct them in faith to Jesus – the One whom the Father has sent – the One who gives them “the food that endures to eternal life” – but they looked to Jesus for other things and so do we.

They sought out Jesus to fill their bellies – we want Him to give us good health, peace in the family, a nice retirement nest egg. We may even look to Him for the forgiveness of our sins – but is it only so that we can go on sinning? Do we need Him in order to be rescued from death and the devil? Do we look to Him only for temporal life, and forget about the life everlasting?

Jesus, the Son of Man, desires to give us His gifts – and we balk at what He offers. “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” And our response is like those in the text – “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.”

Ever patient because of His steadfast love – Jesus calmly shows how He has already given them a sign. My Father gave your fathers that bread from heaven – and I AM that Bread from Heaven – which my Father is giving to you NOW!

I’ve already fed you with the 5 loaves and 2 fish – I’ve already healed the sick, cast out the unclean spirits – and cared for all your temporal and earthly needs. But don’t miss the signs – that these all show you that I AM the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior sent by the Father to provide for your temporal and eternal life.

Dearly beloved, you have gathered here from the surrounding countryside to “find Jesus” where He has promised to be, where two or three are gathered in His name. But what are you looking for? Have you seen His signs? Have you received the gift He desires to give – the Bread from heaven – the food that endures to eternal life?

Jesus comes from heaven and washes away all your iniquity that spoils the life God has created – puts to death the Old Adam and resurrects the New Man, the new creation who lives by faith.

Jesus has given you the Holy Spirit who lightens your path by His Holy Word. He gives you your daily bread. He gives you His Body and His Blood – food that does not spoil – food that give you His everlasting life.

God works a FAITH in you that looks to Jesus, “the Bread of Life” – faith in Jesus even when your stomach rumbles – faith in Jesus when your body aches, your eyes and ears deteriorate – faith in Jesus when your family is in turmoil ----- FAITH in Jesus, “the work of God” – so that you may endure to eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.