

TEXT: John 6:60-69

THEME: JESUS, YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

CUE 15.1—Our Gospel lesson today tells us of an unpleasant experience Jesus had after miraculously feeding thousands of people. The previous day, a little boy’s lunch bucket had become a banquet for 5,000 men plus women and children—perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 people in all.

CUE 15.2—The next day, many of his guests followed Jesus to the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus knew exactly why they had come: **“You are looking for me...because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you...You have seen me and still you do not believe” (John 6:26,27,36).**

Why would Jesus speak so harshly to these people? Luke tell us that the previous day **“he welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11).** Jesus’ big message in all of his preaching was “Come to me! The way to the Father is through me!”

But the previous afternoon Jesus had spoken not only with words but with his actions. He backed up what he had been preaching with an amazing miracle. In front of him were thousands of people who were hungry after having listened to him for most of the day. Late in the afternoon, Jesus told the disciples, “These people are hungry. Give them something to eat.” When they replied, “All we’ve got is a boy’s lunch—two fish and five little barley loaves,” Jesus took those loaves and fish, gave thanks, and performed an amazing miracle.

Can you recognize how Christ preached that day? Not only with words but with a miracle! **CUE 15.3**—And what a miracle! Instead of five little barley loaves, all of a sudden there were tens of thousands of barley loaves composed of grain that had never been harvested from fields or baked in ovens. And instead of two little fish, there were at least ten thousand fish that had never been hatched from eggs or been caught in nets in the Sea of Galilee or dried in the sun.

But Jesus’ guests turned down his friendly invitation—“Come to me!” Free lunch? That they would accept. Christ as king of a restored nation of Israel? That they would buy. Jesus as almighty God in human form and the only way to the heavenly Father? Thanks, but no thanks.

Jesus, this carpenter turned teacher, whom some of them had grown up with in Nazareth, was claiming to be the only way to the Father in heaven? Preposterous! Hard to believe—IMPOSSIBLE to believe! Most rejected him. Jesus did not force them to believe.

Today, too, Jesus does not use force to get people to follow him—just words. **CUE 15.4**—With Simon Peter, we want to respond (say it with me outloud), **“[Jesus] you have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”**

By the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, Peter had it right. He had listened to Jesus and understood what he was saying. He had seen Jesus back up his claim to be the only way to heaven with an amazing miracle. But most of the people who had been the beneficiaries of that wonderful miracle responded in a different way. Instead of focusing on the message of Jesus, they focused only on what Jesus could do for them in this life. **CUE 15.5—**“**[The people] began to say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (John 6:14-15).** Jesus’ hearers would have been glad to have Jesus as their earthly king. (“With him around, we would always have food on the table!”) Jesus refused. He wanted to give these people more than just food to keep them alive for one more day. He wanted to give them the food that would enable them to live with God forever.

Would you agree that, in a sense, Christianity is a very exclusive religion? By *exclusive*, we surely do not mean snobbish. Christianity is not snobbishly exclusive, but it is one-of-a-kind exclusive. **CUE 15.6—**In our Gospel lessons the last few weeks, we’ve heard Jesus claim, “**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry...Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” (John 6:35,40).** Although many different remedies for sin are offered in today’s religious marketplace, there is only one that can bring peace to a guilty conscience. There is only one religion that can remove the sin barrier blocking our access to God.

Jesus explained to his dinner guests that he had not come just to provide food for their bodies. If that’s all he offered, they would only get hungry again. Jesus’ miracle pointed to him as the food that lasts forever and invited hungry hearts to feed on him, that is, to believe in him. Faith is the hand by which we accept the blessings Christ earned for us—with his perfect life and innocent death in our place. Unbelief, on the other hand, is the tragic act by which we close our hands into fists and make it impossible for God to give us the food that lasts forever.

The most important thing happening in the world for you today is what is happening in your head and your heart at this very moment. For the past few precious minutes, you have been in the presence of God as he spoke to you about fixing your life where it’s broken—at the heart. He does that through our Savior Jesus with forgiveness for all of our sins, daily guidance for our earthly lives, and guaranteed eternal life with him in heaven. **CUE 15.7—**Let your response be (read it aloud with me), “**I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation” (Psalm 13:5).** Amen.