**March 22, 2020 John 6:27-40**

***A Hunger and a Sign***

**Scripture:** John 6:27-40 NRSV

*(27)Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." (28)Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" (29)Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (30)So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? (31)Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (32)Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. (33)For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (34)They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." (35)Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (36)But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. (37)Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; (38)for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. (39)And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (40)This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.*

**Notes:**

1. There is a reason fasting is so often linked with ***food***
   1. ***Food*** is something we need.
   2. Fasting reminds us to shift our ***focus*** on Christ.
   3. Jesus is the fulfillment of the ***law***.
2. The people were missing the ultimate sign, ***Jesus***.
   1. Jesus reminded them; God ***supplied*** the manna.
   2. People fail to see who ***Jesus*** is and what he is doing.
3. Do we look for ***signs*** while missing God at work?
   1. It is good to ***look*** ***back*** on the goodness of God.
   2. The “good ol’ days” weren’t ***always*** good.
   3. Are we focusing on works instead of ***faith***?
4. Jesus is the ***bread*** of life.
   1. Jesus claims to be living ***water***
   2. Jesus offers them something ***more***
   3. Trust God for ***provision*** in the present.
5. Jesus wants to be a ***life***-***sustaining*** part of our lives.
   1. Remember the great lengths he went to have a ***relationship*** with you.
   2. Jesus is present in the miracle of ***ordinary*** things
   3. God wants to be more than ***momentary*** satisfaction.
   4. He longs to ***feed*** the deep desires of our soul, to ***fulfill*** the profound longings of our hearts.

**Transcript:**

Have you ever experienced true hunger pains? Our bodies have a way of letting us know when we truly need to eat. But many times, I crave food, and I am not really hungry. I desire to eat, and really do not need the nutrients in my body. Many times, it is my mind, leading me to believe these things. Whether it be because of boredom, whether it is because of the time of day, or maybe even because of an emotional situation, stress has a way of making me think I am hungry.

Deep hunger pangs get your attention; not the type you get when you skip lunch, but the type you feel after a day of hard work without time for a meal; a deep and aching pain that seems like it will go on forever, a pain many of us may have never experienced. Children grabbing their parents’ sleeve and asking when the meal will come and parents who aren’t sure how to answer.

This is the setting for a miracle; the feeding of the five thousand; where aching bellies are filled with bread and fish. Many times, however, what we think are hunger pangs are really something else; a desire for satisfaction that is not met; a desire to feel better about ourselves, perhaps a desire for more of what we have already received.

This is where we find ourselves in our sermon passage today, people desiring more of what they have already received; rather than what they truly need. People rushing to the source, for more of a good thing. Much like those we see hoarding supplies while others are going without. Turn with me today to our sermon passage, John 6:27–40 and share with me in the reading of God’s word.

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It didn’t take long for their bellies to begin to rumble again. Hungry people heard of the miracle, and they began to seek out Jesus; to see if the miracle he performed once would happen again; to see if they could be part of the next one, the next big event. Only, this time, when they came to Jesus, and he scolded them because they were looking for temporary fulfillment; they were looking to have their stomachs filled for the moment, especially when what he was offering was so much more than that.

We too, look for temporary fulfillment, and sometimes even in the form of food. There is a reason fasting is so often linked with food, because it is something we need; something we cannot give up completely. But so often, eating can become something we do in an attempt to fill our hearts, not just our stomachs; for the temporary relief, comfort, and satisfaction of our minds. Fasting reminds us to shift our focus away from what we use to give us immediate fulfillment, whether that be food, social media, television, or unnecessary shopping, so we can focus on Christ, who wants to fill our hearts and not just our bellies.

The followers of Jesus were still focused on the momentary satisfaction. Satisfaction that work would bring. The language of “work” is used throughout the text. The followers were focused on the type of work that produces something temporary. This type of work is focused on the law, not on grace. They had just seen and partaken of a miracle, yet they are still focused on what *they* must do. There is legalism in their questions, betraying their wrongful thinking; that they must *do* something in order to earn favor with God. Jesus shifts this language of work, telling them that the true work that God desires is faith to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is shifting them away from this idea of legalism and law to an idea of faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, to an idea of grace found in and received through the Holy Spirit, and love; love for God our Father in heaven and love for our neighbors. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17). In Romans 13:10, Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law. It would not be an unfair connection to say that, because God is love (1 John 4:8) and Jesus is God, there is still a deep connection here to Jesus being the fulfillment of the law. The law, again, is not about legalism but ultimately about loving God and others.

It’s important to note that Jesus doesn’t say that following God requires *no* work, it’s just that the work itself changes. Faith is its own kind of work, and it is often difficult; to believe in something you cannot see, to believe in something that you have no evidence to justify. However, the work of faith is not legalism.

The people were looking for signs from God and still, they were missing the ultimate sign of God. The followers were so focused on the bread they just ate, and the miracle it was, that they missed out on the true miracle in front of them. Jesus, in their midst. They asked for more signs, even though the text implies they had participated in the feeding of the 5000. Even though their bellies were full, they wanted more.

In verse 26, Jesus states, "*Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves*.” Jesus admonishes the people for seeking him, they weren’t truly looking for him, they were looking for what he could do for them. They ate their fill, and they longed for more. They so desired another sign from Jesus that they seemingly tried to guilt-trip him into one. They reminded Him of the manna in the wilderness with Moses. They still missed the point even there, though. Jesus had to remind them it wasn’t Moses who gave them the manna; it was God who supplied the manna, every day he supplied what they needed to survive. God is the one who provides signs for God’s people. This reminder is again seeking to point back to Jesus, who is the ultimate sign from God.

This connects with the text of the Samaritan woman in chapter 4. It follows the same theme. She talks about when the Messiah will come, she speaks of what will happen when the Messiah comes, and yet, she is missing the Messiah in her very midst. This is a theme for John: despite having the Messiah in their midst, they continue to miss him. They fail to understand who the Messiah is. They fail to see who Jesus is, and they fail to see what he is doing.

How often do we look for signs from God, while missing God at work in the world around us? Nostalgia, gets in the way; looking back on the experiences we had with God in the past, longing to bring back the way things were can many times distract us from what is going on in our very midst. Distracting us from the work God is doing right now. Just like the people who ate the bread at the feeding of the 5000; they were looking back both at their own experiences and also, at the experiences of their ancestors. Many of us have had moments of great experiences with God, and we long to go back to those moments, to live in the glory days; whether it was the moment that you came to give your life to Christ, or maybe a moment at camp or a conference where the Spirit was revealed, perhaps even a significant conversation with someone.

It is good to look back on the goodness of God, both in our lives and in the lives of those who have gone before us. However, it is not good to do so at the expense of what is happening in the present. One of the significant moments in the story of Moses is that God calls himself “I Am.” This designation is rendered in the present tense. God is present with God’s people. He always has and He always will. While looking back at the miracle of the manna, the people seem to have forgotten the “I Am”ness of God.

We often forget that the “good ol’ days” weren’t always as good as we remember they had their problems, they had their struggles and disappointments. The filling of their stomachs at the feeding of the 5000, was a temporary fix to a lifelong problem, the next day they would be hungry again. These people will always have a hunger for more, a hunger preceded the miracle and a hunger continued to follow these people after the miracle. The filling of their stomachs in the wilderness with manna was surrounded by difficulty as well; remember how the people complained. The people complained about the lack of food. The people complained about their hunger. They longed to go back into slavery. They struggled with idolatry, and all of this was in the midst of miracle after miracle. These miracles, and the people who were a part of them, did not guarantee long-term faith, it did not guarantee the disappearance of their problems.

Are we focusing on works instead of faith? While we claim to be a people of faith and grace, we still get caught up in legalism. Instead of pursuing love, we often view faith as a checklist of avoiding certain things, while doing certain others. We know we fall into this trap when we tend to walk around in slavery to shame. We know we fall into this trap when we fail to extend grace and forgiveness for ourselves. We know we fall into this trap when we believe that God can love and forgive others but can’t possibly love and forgive us; or when we believe that there are limits to God’s grace, forgiveness, or love.

We can also focus on the work of others, instead of focusing on being love to others. We fall into this trap when we have a judgmental spirit toward others, instead of extending grace. We fall into this trap when we decide who is in the kingdom of God and who is out, instead of seeking to embrace all and allowing God to do the sorting. We fall into this trap when we decide we shouldn’t associate with certain types of people, instead of embracing all people with the same love that God embraces us with.

We also focus on work over faith when our life never exhibits a rhythm of Sabbath rest. Work is not just about the legalism that can be part of following the law but also can just be about work. When the momentary satisfaction of our busyness consumes us, there is little room for other things. When we are prideful about how busy we are. When we are not taking time to spend time with God because we are just too busy doing the work of God (a hard one for those of us in vocational ministry to remember, but all of us are susceptible to this trap.)

Jesus is the bread of life. He satisfies beyond a mere moment. The idea of Jesus as bread of life connects to John 4 and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well again. In John 4, Jesus claims to be living water that will cause those who drink it thirst no more. He contrasts this assertion with drinking from a well, which will only satisfy for a short while. The woman at the well wants this water, even without fully understanding what it means. When she realizes what Jesus is talking about; that he is, in fact, the Messiah, and that he longs to connect her to a relationship with God, everything changes for her.

The people aren’t looking for anything more than bread for the moment, but Jesus offers them something more anyway. We see bread used symbolically in much of Scripture. Most famous are the words “give us this day our daily bread” from the Lord’s Prayer. The focus is on trusting God for provision in the present. This is a lesson that the people are still learning as they long for signs of the past instead of trusting God in the moment. Bread is a cornerstone food for all societies. Every culture has some version of bread, and though it is not always nutrient-dense, this prayer for daily bread tends to be somewhat universal. We also see bread used in the Eucharist (see Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19). Bread is being used to illustrate the body of Christ and the ways it is broken for the world.Jesus is present in this ordinary, life-sustaining food.

Jesus wants to be more in the lives of his followers than momentary satisfaction. He wants to be a regular, life-sustaining part of his followers’ lives. Jesus’s followers wanted food, food for the moment, but Jesus wanted to be more than a fleeting emotional high in people’s lives and more than just a momentary miracle. Jesus wanted to be the sustaining part of their lives.

Jesus wants to be more than momentary satisfaction for you as well. He wants to be a regular, life-sustaining part of your life. He wants to give you daily bread, the sustenance needed to meet each day. He wants you to have a regular relationship with Him, a relationship without doubts, fears, or worries. He knows we have enough to worry about in these days. That is why he willingly allowed himself to be broken for you, to be broken for me and broken for each and every one of us. He wants you to remember the great lengths he went to, to have a relationship with you; to see what he is currently doing in your life and in the world around you. He doesn’t want you to be waiting for the next miraculous sign. Jesus is present not only in the hugely miraculous things that take place. Jesus is present in the miracle of ordinary things every day, like bread and how it comes to be what it is; like a sunrise and how each day comes and goes like clockwork; like the flower that blooms, or the leaves on a tree; like the birth of a child and the love you feel when you are surrounded by those closest to you. God wants to be more to you than momentary satisfaction in your life. God doesn’t want you to miss out on the miracles; the ordinary ways that he is at work in the world right now. The ordinary ways he works everyday in your presence just because we are focused on what God did in the past or longing for what God might do in the future.

In the beauty of our relationship with our father in heaven, the relationship we have with our savior Jesus Christ, and the relationship we share with the Holy Spirit. We are reminded that Christ’s body was broken for us and that he is the bread of life. We see that symbolism in the Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper; and when we partake of this Holy Sacrament. We are reminded of all that He did so we can come to him. He longs to feed the deep desires of our soul. He desires to fulfill the profound longings of our hearts, He wishes to release us from our legalism and the sin that encompasses us, He wants to free us to a life satisfied by an unwavering relationship with him.

We have a hunger that can only be satisfied by the bread of life. We have a thirst that can only be satisfied at the well of living water. Jesus is the bread of life and the living water; if we do not eat and drink at the source, we will never be fulfilled. We have been given a sign; in the sign of the cross, a symbol of death that has been transformed to be a symbol of life eternal in our Lord Jesus Christ.