

*Texts: Psalm 34:1-10; John 6:1-15, 25-27, 35-40, 48-51:*

*Subject: Jesus Feeds 5000/the Bread of Life*

*Theme: Whatcha' Eatin'?*

*Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, February 13, 2022; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I read this week that 13,000 tons of chips, 1.25 billion chicken wings, and 3,600 tons of guacamole will be consumed today. Anybody hungry? That's a lot of food. It's Valentine's Day weekend too, and sunny and 72 degrees in Las Vegas - our city's restaurants and buffets have been full this weekend. I may not look like it, but I love to eat. I follow the Las Vegas Food scene on facebook and love finding out about the newest and best places to eat in this food city. If you need a recommendation, I'm glad to help. Food brings us together. We sit across the table and meet a new friend, gather around snacks or supper for important conversations and celebrations, memorials, and meals to mark all kinds of occasions. Our food tells stories about family, culture, and history. Maybe when you cook and eat those comfort foods we grew up with, you tell the story of why it's your favorite. Maybe you compare recipes for mac & cheese, or BBQ on the smoker, or depending on where you're from, hot dish or casserole. Now I'm getting hungry.

I made wings last weekend. You know that's my favorite. It's a Valentine's date for us tonight - after the game, of course. How about you? What's in the pot or on the grill this Super Sunday? *Whatcha' eatin'?*

As we prepare for a party, a dinner at home or a night out, we remain mindful of those who struggle with food. Some fight to keep from overdoing it. Others struggle with not enough. Food can nourish our bodies and bring us together, or become a

danger and cause damage too. Whether we have too much or not enough, we need to eat something.

Jesus was teaching and healing and the crowds came out to hear him and seek his help. We read that there were 5,000 men, and must assume there were women and children there too. How many in all? More than 5,000. A massive crowd is gathered, and it's been a day, so they must have been getting hungry. There's no drive thru, no food trucks, not even an overpriced concession stand there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberius, depending on where you're from). Jesus asked Philip where to get some catering, of course already knowing what was going to take place. Why did he have to test him? Philip takes note of the size of the crowd - there's no way they could possibly find enough food for all these people. It would take a miracle. There was a boy nearby with some bread and fish. Jesus took it, and fed them by his own hands. When all were full, they had so much leftover, it filled twelve baskets! The people knew something special had happened and got it in their collective mind to take Jesus and make him a king.

The one who can feed the people so well, must have a lot of power, and would seemingly make a good leader. John, one of the dads in our Girl Scout Troop loves to make a smoked brisket. He's got many gifts, but he's really a championship BBQ guy. I always have to ask if he'll be joining us for campouts and events. My mouth is watering just thinking about it. It's part of the fun when we go camping to see what everyone is making. "Watcha' eatin'?" I'll ask. Campfire sandwiches, carne asada, hot dogs, quesadillas - all of our favorites. The dad who makes the brisket is the king.

Of course, Jesus was not about to be the kind of king they had in mind, and he got out of there. The people find him and again he notes that they believed because their bellies were filled - they saw the sign and came to believe in him on some level. But there was more they needed. One meal is never going to be enough, he explained later. "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."

We search for life in so many things that cannot give it back to us. We eat things full of sugar and fat and wonder why our bodies fail us. We seek out foods that are not sustainable for the world we live in and take more than our share while others go hungry. Human beings fill up on cultural junk food to be entertained and wonder why our spirits are famished. We get stuck in patterns that are destroying us and need help to find ourselves again.

Jesus keeps on teaching, saying, "I AM the bread of life."

I AM - Hear the name God gave when Moses asked. I AM - This is the God who freed the people from slavery in Egypt, who provided bread from heaven. "I AM the bread of life." God is giving this life bread to all people, in the very body of Jesus.

John's gospel includes Jesus himself distributing the bread, a difference from the other gospel writers. Back in chapter 1 we heard, "No one has ever seen God, it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Scholar Karoline Lewis writes that, "Abundance cannot be separated from its source." God is that source of love and life - in Jesus who feeds us. As the Son of God, Jesus makes God's love - and relationship with God known. Jesus is the creative love of God in the world, the one who frees us from sin and death itself - the healer of our wounds

and He sends the life-sustaining power of the Holy Spirit to us. Abundant life comes from the hands of Jesus, who is God with us.

This week, our senior meal program marked its 7th anniversary here! Over the years, we've seen so many folks come together to be fed, build relationships, safety, and joy. It's pretty amazing what an idea and a little food can do. And the food is good - I like to pop in there when I'm able to say hi and check in. "Whatcha' eatin'?" So many who come here are hungry and thirsty, not just for food and water, but for a friendly face, a listening ear, a place to rest, and to hear good news. Thank you church, for hosting these special guests every day.

Jacques Maritain wrote, "The care of another – even material, bodily care – is spiritual in essence. Bread for myself is a material question; bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one." Jesus feeds us, and invites us to feed others. As we receive the food we need, we are blessed to be in relationship with neighbors who need us too, who are fed physically and also spiritually, whether we mention Jesus with words or not. We show up for those who are hungry in so many ways, and by being present, even just for a brief moment, remind them they are not isolated, but interconnected in the relationship of all living things. We all need to be seen and heard, just like we need food to live.

As he breaks down the sign of the bread for his disciples, Jesus promises that life is more than what we eat. Jesus announces that all who believe - whoever receives the bread of Jesus - will have life forever. Who eats this bread will truly live. Yes, from this table we receive bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. We are reminded every week of the bread God has given to us in Jesus. That promise of abundant life is ours here and now, and nourishes us to go from here and share it with others. We are

connected with the church across the world that gathers at tables, that receives the same bread and wine, the same forgiveness and grace in the sacrament. Even if it comes in that little sanitary jello cup with the wafer on top and thimble of juice, the meal is a taste of the feast God has promised is ours right now.

*Whatcha' eatin'?*

I don't just want to eat and breathe, to just survive. I want to be alive - to truly live an abundant life - and that's not to say that believing in Jesus brings any kind of world success, riches, or power. There may be times in our lives when faith is all we have. I want to live and love abundantly, to share the bread I have, to joyfully collect leftovers, to serve hungry friends, and to gather around tables with loved ones and strangers, to learn from them and be served by them too! Abundant life looks like feasting together on the best bread basket from the best restaurant, at the center of the biggest table, where everyone gets a seat, and maybe some of that honey butter too - that's good stuff.

Jesus is the bread of life from heaven. The love of God given to us, the food that frees and forgives us and fuels us to love others, and serve joyfully, and to give from what we have been given, with gratitude and care for neighbors.

That is the life Jesus brings. 5 stars. 10/10 would recommend.

Come and eat!