



10th Sunday after Pentecost – July 27-28-29, 2024

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Come to Jesus' Picnic

1. With eyes bigger than your stomach 2. Expecting to pig out

Mark 6: 35-44

³⁵By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish." ³⁹Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

In the name of Jesus, who truly satisfies, dear Christian friends,

The Guinness Book of World Records lists the largest picnic in history is one attended by 22,000 people back in 2009 in Lisbon, Portugal. Over 400 buses brought the Portuguese people to this event and the people even brought their own food. Imagine what that must have been like. Obviously, the good people at Guinness need to read their Gospels more because actually the Savior Jesus single handedly hosted the largest picnic in recorded history. It's recorded by all four Gospel writers as the feeding of the 5000. But, that number 5000 only included men. Add women and children to that number and some Bible commentators estimate the true number of people fed that day was closer to 25,000 people. Talk about a picnic. There were no buses that brought the people to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They walked – WALKED to that event. And they didn't even bring their own food. Proving Himself again to be the strong Son of God, Jesus alone provided for all they needed with a miracle of Biblical proportion. And he proves Himself powerful enough to take care of us every single day

Jesus and His disciples enjoyed their fair share of feasting. But, they didn't have to survive on frozen pizzas or TV dinners. The Gospels tell us someone was always inviting them over for dinner. In our sermon reading from St. Mark, we find them eating – call it a picnic. As we take a closer look at the feeding of the 5000 in Mark chapter 6, we'll hear how Jesus not only feeds stomachs, but He also fill souls. So **Come to Jesus' Picnic. Come 1. With eyes bigger than your stomach. And come to Jesus' picnic expecting to pig out.**

When you come to a church picnic or potluck, what do you see? Temptations of a good kind, and maybe a challenge to sample a little bit of everything. We've had some amazing meals in my short ministry prepared in the Fellowship Hall by our St. Paul's volunteers. What blessings. And if you don't have room, you can always go back for seconds (or thirds, fourths). When it comes to dinner, we're rightly taught from an early age not to let our eyes get bigger than our stomachs. But, when it comes to church meals, we all tend to suffer from gastronomic myopia, that's fancy words for: eating too much.

I trust you're more self-disciplined when it comes to tasty food. But, in our sermon reading, Jesus wants us to come to His picnic with eyes BIGGER than our stomachs. He wants our faith to see far beyond what our human eyes are telling us. And Jesus sets the tone here. Earlier in chapter 6, Mark reports the sad news that John the Baptist was executed. That was hard on Jesus because remember John was not only a faithful servant of God but also his cousin cousin -- family. This event made Jesus show His human side to grieve withdrawing to a solitary place on a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee. He wanted some alone time, to teach His disciples in peace. So what did Jesus see here? Not only did he see the death of someone close, He looked into the not-so-distant future and saw His own painful death on the cross to save the world from sin, coming very soon, less than 18 months away. Not much time left. And the clock was ticking. This didn't turn out to be much of a rest. The crowds were waiting for him as they got to the other side. I'll bet the disciples were thinking as they saw all these people: "let's turn this rig around and avoid them." But, Jesus saw something different. He saw opportunity. Imagine when you duck into a store to get a gallon of milk and you see someone who can talk till the cows come home. Do you make a quick exit before they see you? Just think – you might be passing up an opportunity to minister to their needs, to listen and offer a sympathetic ear. But, when Jesus sees the crowd, He heals their sick. Just think about how all those sick people got there. We load our kids into our air-conditioned vehicles and think we have it hard. But, can you imagine walking 4-5 miles to the middle of nowhere with someone who's blind, lame, or demon-possessed? What does this show us? Jesus doesn't turn His back on anyone.

Jesus taught them as "sheep without a shepherd." By nature, none of us has an appetite for God's will or God's ways. We tend to pick and choose what commandments are convenient and what commandments we tend to break like a glass bowl – kind of a cafeteria style religion. You know what cafeteria-style religion is, don't you? It's very popular today: I'll take some of this but not so much of that, ignoring the fact that all God's commandments matter. By passing up God's dishes, we don't just risk offending Him. We risk the Holy judgment of God unless we fill ourselves up with Christ. In a very real way, Jesus swallowed up all of God's anger at our sins when He died on the cross, paying our penalty. His forgiveness is full and sweet. At Jesus' picnic, we get to eat dessert FIRST – what forgiveness and what a deal. And when we take the forgiving words of Christ to heart, we can never get our fill.

The disciples saw Jesus meet their needs all day long. But, then they also saw a real problem. Our reading says: ³⁵***By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples***

came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” What were their problems? Let’s see: it’s late. Too many hungry people with rumbly stomachs. No fast food restaurants for miles. Send them away before things get ugly.

Now Jesus responds: **“You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages^[e]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”** What does Jesus have in mind here? Oh, He could’ve said: “I’ll take care of it” but instead puts the burden on His disciples. Why? He’s teaching them. He wants them to look far beyond their own reason and abilities and look to God alone to provide. Five loaves and two fish to feed 25,000 people. No doubt the disciples had more on their plate than they thought they can handle.

How full is YOUR plate? The job. The kids. The mortgage. The car that needs repairs and that family member that keeps you up at night. It’s a lot, isn’t it? Don’t you think Jesus knows? Don’t you think He cares? We have a full schedule this summer. I mean, after all, do we really need to come to church every week when we have so much to do? Do we really need to give the best of our church offerings when junior has camp expenses and someone has to pay for that vacation? We have about all we can handle – or do we? What’s keeping us from volunteering to take a Sunday or two to serve donuts or help in the church nursery. Do we ever complain that we have a large congregation at St. Paul’s and we have the same people who help. I’ve done that too. Join me in confessing: LORD, have mercy. Isaiah’s Word asks us some good questions and promises us God’s help: **“Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare”** His point? God has piled our table high with spiritual and physical blessings. Can we really say to Him: “That’s enough for me. I’m full?” What’s keeping us from tapping into His limitless blessings? My brothers and sisters, no matter how full our plate is, God will make room for more. So don’t be afraid to load up on His grace and mercy!

And don’t be afraid that when God is OUR priority, we’ll run out of time or money. This miracle is clear: God ... WILL ... Provide, not only what we WANT but what we NEED. When we go to a New Ulm picnic, expect to pig out. And especially when you come to Jesus’ picnic, expect to really pig out. Look at how Jesus provided for the crowd in today’s lesson. **³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.** First, He directs the people to sit down. Mind you, these aren’t Germans who like order and discipline. He’s trying to avoid a stampede and He knows there will be enough for everyone.

Then, He does something surprising: **⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to**

his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. First, He gives thanks to God as an example for us so that all may know where their blessings come from. Then, He breaks the bread. I think a lot is lost on us here because our bread comes pre-sliced. In our country, bread is more of a condiment than a staple. But, in the Middle East, you don't eat a meal without bread. And when someone shares their bread with you, it means he welcomes you into his home. Jesus calls Himself: "The Bread of LIFE". Just as He broke bread with His disciples, He willingly broke His body on the cross to pay for our every last sin. And by offering Himself to us, He shows us we are ALL welcome in His Father's house for all eternity.

I can almost taste those brats and burgers served at a summer picnic, can't you? There's a lot of summer left and summer picnics still to attend. But more importantly, this day, in this sermon, we've been served with God's promises to provide when we need Him most. Just like the people were satisfied with the fishes and the loaves, we've are satisfied by hearing our debt of sins are forgiven and our eternity in heaven is secure all because of Jesus. Now, even when life is NO picnic, let's prepare to face every day with Jesus, who is better than a Snicker's bar – for He truly satisfies. Amen.