

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
The twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Eat the bread that doesn't mold

²⁴When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶Jesus answered them, "Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." ²⁸So they said to him, "What should we do to carry out the works of God?" ²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent." ³⁰Then they asked him, "So what miraculous sign are you going to do, that we may see it and believe you? What miraculous sign are you going to perform?" ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "³²Jesus said to them, "Amen, Amen, I tell you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴"Sir," they said to him, "give us this bread all the time!" ³⁵"I am the Bread of Life," Jesus told them. "The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty."

– John 6:24-35 EHV

Can I tell you a scary story? One day, a young man came home after football practice. He was so hungry. He decided to make some lunch. He would make himself a sandwich. He grabbed the lunch meat, mayo, cheese, and bread. Then, he opened the bag of sliced bread, and suddenly... He saw that the bread was moldy! (Dun... dun... dun... Ahhh!) Tragic and scary, I know. Now, he needed to throw it out and go without. I apologize if this scary story was too really for you to even stomach. Okay, maybe scary story wasn't the right term. Maybe it was a mundane memoir about mold.

Bread goes moldy and becomes inedible. So, too, do many things have a shelf life. Most foods have expiration dates. Milk goes sour. Meat spoils. Fruit rots. This is a powerful reminder that in this life, we often invest our time and energy in things that do not endure.

In today's lesson, Jesus directs us to eat the bread that doesn't mold. In this life, people can focus on working for things that do not endure. Jesus turns our eyes away from such things toward himself. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Therefore, let us eat the bread that doesn't mold. With this in mind, we will move to our verses from Scripture today.

The verses that we consider today follow the sections of Scripture that we have heard recently in our worship services. Three weeks ago, we heard about Jesus' compassion that led him to miraculously feed 5,000 plus people. Last week, we heard about Jesus walking on water. These three accounts come successively in John's gospel.

This is the flow of logic as John presents it. First, Jesus fed 5,000 plus people. The people saw this and thought, "You know what... We should force him to be our king." They failed to see Jesus' miracle as a sign of who he is. Instead, they were focused on the food that they would receive. Jesus recognized that they would plan to use force on him, so he withdrew from them by himself. In the evening, a storm hit.

This is when Jesus' disciples saw him walking on water. After Jesus got into the boat, he brought his disciples to the shore.

The next day, the crowd recognized that the boat was gone. So, they got into boats and headed to Capernaum to find Jesus. There, in Capernaum, Jesus had this conversation with the people in which he directed them to eat the bread that doesn't mold.

When the crowds of people met Jesus, they asked him, "Teacher, when did you get here?" However, Jesus did not answer their question. Jesus recognized their improper motives. Instead of giving them the answer to the question they asked, Jesus gave them the answer that they needed.

Rebuking the crowds, Jesus said, "You didn't come looking for me because you saw the signs." Now, these were signs that indicated who he was. "You came here because you had your fill of food." These people didn't recognize that the miracles that Jesus performed showed that he was the Son of God. Instead, they just looked at Jesus and essentially said, "Give me some more of that bread!"

After rebuking them, Jesus redirected them with one of the key verses in this text. Jesus said to them, "Don't continue to work for food that spoils." They focused on what earthly blessings Jesus could give them. Specifically, they were responding to the miraculous feeding of bread and fish. What happens to bread and fish? Well, the bread molds, and the fish spoils. Food is not the only thing that goes bad. All earthly blessings will go bad. Whether it is a car that breaks down like the ones Pastor Buchholz mentioned last week during those road trips or your very own life, earthly blessings do not last. So, Jesus told this crowd, "Don't focus on working for these things."

Now, when Jesus told them not to continue working for food, he was not telling them to quit working altogether. The Scriptures are clear when they tell us that we must work to eat. As Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians, "In fact, when we were with you, this was our command to you: If anyone does not want to work, he should not eat." When Jesus told them not to continue working for food, he was telling them not to put this as a greater priority than their spiritual needs.

Jesus directed the crowd to eat the bread that doesn't mold, the Bread of Life. At the end of this text, Jesus indicated that he is the Bread of Life, the source of eternal sustenance. People should focus on him and the spiritual gifts that he gives, such as forgiveness and grace.

Since Jesus had told the people not to work for food that spoils, they asked what they must do to do the works of God. Jesus' response flipped their question. Jesus told them what the work of God is. God works faith in people. Jesus' message to these people was to believe in the one that God had sent.

It is apparent that the crowd knew that Jesus was referring to himself with that previous statement in that they asked him, "So, what are you going to do?" They then referenced the manna in the wilderness that Pastor Pufahl spoke of a couple of weeks ago in a sermon, which we read about today. This bread was not from Moses but from God. God gave them bread from heaven.

This is where Jesus again emphasizes the bread that God now gives from heaven, as opposed to the manna, endures and gives enduring life. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Jesus directed them not to eat the bread that molds. He redirected them to eat the bread that doesn't mold. This is the bread that endures. In this statement, Jesus directed them to himself and the spiritual blessings that he gives: forgiveness and grace.

What is the takeaway point from what Jesus said to the crowds? The ultimate takeaway is that we should not spend our lives focused on gaining earthly blessings that perish. Instead, we need to focus our

attention on Jesus, who gives greater spiritual blessings that do not perish but last for eternity. Eat the bread that doesn't mold.

What do you do if your food has mold on it? Well, cheese seems to be an exceptional food, as you can cut that section off and eat the other part of the cheese. Many people, however, will simply throw the block of cheese out. According to the USDA, if bread has mold on it, you need to throw all of it out. As we noted, this is the nature of food. It spoils.

This is more than the nature of food, though. This is the reality of all earthly blessings. All earthly blessings will face ruin, whether it be through destruction in this life or on the last day. The things of this life do not last.

Therefore, Jesus directs us not to focus on the things that do not last. He tells us not to simply toil away for the food that spoils. We are encouraged to eat the bread that doesn't mold. We should focus our attention on Jesus and his spiritual blessings over the physical blessings of this life.

Jesus told the crowd not to continue to work for food that spoils. This is a preaching of God's law that we need to hear as well. The crowd of people looked to Jesus for the physical blessings that he could give. They cared about this more so than his true purpose. How can we, too, be guilty of "working for food that spoils?" Remember, the problem is not working, but priority.

At this moment, I am going to give a few examples in which a person's priorities may be off. Then, that person could be valuing the desire for physical blessings over the need for the spiritual gifts of God. In some of these examples, a person could make a similar action and not be sinning. Remember, the heart behind the matter is often the most important.

Example 1 is the dad who wants to give his kids everything. In many ways, he is a great dad. He spends time with his kids. He makes a good salary so that he can send his kids to private school and take them on many trips. Since Dad works a lot, he prioritizes taking opportunities to get away with his kids. He likes to take the family on little trips. The problem, however, is that the trips often take place over the weekend. In the process of giving his kids a wonderful life, he disconnects them from that which gives lasting life. The trips will end. The memories may fade. The thing that lasts in this scenario is that pattern of disconnect from God's Word and sacraments that the dad established for his children.

Example 2 is the college student who wants to save up money for school. Working during college is an admirable thing. Working hard so that you do not need many student loans is a great goal to set forward. Yet, this college student begins to prioritize paying for college over studying God's Word. Next thing you know, she is not attending campus ministry. She is not reading the Bible in her dorm room. She isn't even going to church on Sundays or Mondays. Why is all this happening? She is focused on the things of this world over the things of God. She may avoid financial debt, but she is disconnecting herself from the Savior who gives true debt forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters, can you see yourself in any way in those previous examples? It is possible for us to become consumed with a desire for financial stability and well-being in this life. This would then lead us to prioritize bread that molds over the bread that doesn't mold. These sinful priorities could lead us away from Christ. Often, this detachment doesn't happen overnight. Much like bread, it doesn't mold instantly; instead, it is gradual. First, it is our thoughts. Then, it is our words. Then, it is our actions. Finally, you wake up one day, whether you are financially stable or not, and you are completely disconnected from God and his means of grace because you pursued the bread that molds to the detriment of your eating of the bread that doesn't mold.

Let us confess and repent of the times that we have valued the physical blessings over the spiritual blessings that God gives. Let us repent of the times that we have been consumed by a focus on the earthly life to the point that we did not care about our spiritual lives. In repentance, let us then look to Jesus. He is the Bread of Life. Eat the bread that doesn't mold.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He gives you eternal life. Those who feast upon this bread that is, those who believe in him, will never hunger or thirst. The Father sent this bread for you. Through him and what he did in his life and death on the cross, you receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In Jesus, you are sustained.

Perhaps you have found out from experience that bread does not last as you opened a bag to see mold on the bread. You know what is scarier than moldy bread? Relying on things that spoil. Today, Jesus directs us to eat the bread that doesn't mold. Jesus is the Bread of Life. The gifts that he gives, forgiveness, grace, and life, shall last forever. Amen.