

John 6:24-35
August 5, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Sometime ago I heard Bishop Burk tell a story, which has stayed with me. I am not certain; but, it may have been when our church council gathered for an evening with the Bishop at the Synod Center for Ministry in Iowa City (aka Synod Office) several months ago. As I recall Bishop Burk was pastoring a congregation, which if my mind serves me correctly, was in Waverly. He had been told early on from one of the church leaders they never cancel church – no matter the circumstances such as adverse weather. Bishop Burk didn't see that as a problem as the home his family was living in was just a few blocks away. However, one winter, there was a storm unlike any other he had experienced in his tenure there. A snow apocalypse if you will with inches upon inches of snow on the ground upon waking up from a long winters evening. If there was a time to cancel church, this appeared to be it. Surely, no one would mind and more than likely only a brave soul or two would show up. Heck! He wasn't even sure he could get there as so many of the streets and sidewalks had yet to be plowed. So, he called the council president to discuss the possibility of cancelling worship. I don't recall the exact words out of the council president's mouth as the Bishop retold the

story; however, it was essentially something to the affect of “Nonsense! Stay put, I’ll be over shortly to get you.” Sure enough, in time, a pickup truck came into sight through the snow and they made it to the church and he was surprised when he found many people were indeed present. As time went by and he reflected upon it he wondered, “Why? What was so important to these folks for braving the elements and getting to worship that morning?” The answer of course – Jesus, the bread of life. It was their need to be fed and nurtured.

So, naturally, we might ask, “Well, what about those who decided to stay home? Were they less faithful? Did they not have the same spiritual needs?” At no time did Bishop Burk allude to any such thinking and knowing him as I have gotten to know him it would simply be crazy to even make that leap. The point of the story was not that one should go to church no matter what even if it means risking one’s life. No, the point of the story is the fact we are hungry for the word of God. We have a need that can only be met by an encounter with the risen Christ. Physical food alone can’t do it. Money can’t do it or buy it. Only God can fill this hungering and God does it through Jesus Christ.

Set in the context of John’s gospel, this story comes immediately off the heels of the feeding of the 5,000 and then Jesus’ walking on water and meeting the disciples in their fear as the boat in which they were in to get to the other side

of the lake was being tossed to and from by a violent storm. I believe this important to the story as a whole as of course Jesus is fully aware of the human condition. The various essential needs of each person. Physical nourishment is in fact one of them and Jesus meets that need. Jesus knows of our need for safety and security and he meets that need. Yet, despite all this there is more. There is a spiritual hunger deep inside us. An insatiable appetite for something more than material objects, fortune or fame. Is that not exactly why we are here on Sunday? To be fed and nourished by the power of the Holy Spirit so we can confidently continue to believe in Jesus.

As I look back upon 46 years of my life there have been so many moments I have wandered aimlessly searching for something to satisfy a hunger within me; even, when I thought I had it all. Even surrounded by friends and family, I have felt alone. Empty and seeking a sign for meaning and purpose. As I think about those times so many of them are moments when something is missing – Jesus. Times when my prayer life was virtually non-existent. Seasons when my eyes were blind to whom was the source of all I had. Periods when I had done or said something and felt as if God could never love or forgive me. Times when I was angry with God because something had happened in my life and I couldn't

understand why, or sensed God was nowhere to be found. Times when I didn't see the need to gather with the people of God in worship.

I suspect we have each had those moments. The good news is that Jesus is always there for us. There is nothing that can separate us from his love. He is the bread of life that is freely offered. No questions asked. No money needed. No sin too big. No faith too small. Believe in me he says. Believe in me and you will be filled now. Not tomorrow or sometime in the future; but, now for our Lord and Savior says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."