

The Bread of Life
Mt. 14:13-21
Pentecost 9
August 6, 2017

Dear Friends in Christ,

Do you know how many lives a cat has? Some people say 9? And sometimes one might think so -- especially if you're not particularly fond of the furry little creatures. For those who love cats, even 9 lives wouldn't be sufficient. But alas, the truth is, a cat has only one life.

Human beings, on the other hand, have - or are meant to have - more than one life. God intends that you and I have lives, (in the plural). God intends that we have bodily life – a life characterized by breathing, thinking, and muscular activity. He gives us this life through our parents. But God intends that we also have a spiritual life, a relationship with God himself. That life is characterized by loving God with our whole heart and mind and strength and loving our neighbor as our self.

This life God gives in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, as he did this morning to little Ingrid. He nourishes that life through the Scripture's message of salvation and through the Lord's body and blood given in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In God's design, we are to be born and then be born again. In fact, unless this second birth occurs, Jesus once told Nicodemus, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Logically then, designed as we are for two kinds of life, physical and spiritual, a human being needs two kinds of bread, or food, bodily food and spiritual food. Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, is the Food that Endures to Eternal Life. We need the bread that gives eternal spiritual life. Now, to be sure, we need the daily bread that gives bodily life — and God is not indifferent to this need. His concern for our daily bodily life is clearly demonstrated in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. In this morning's text we read how Jesus, seeing the need among the crowd, multiplied the loaves of bread and fed the multitude.

This same concern for our daily bodily survival is seen in the Old Testament where God provided food for the Children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness of Sinai. In response to their great need, God provided "bread from heaven", called Manna, every morning and quail for meat in the evening. God's great desire to provide for our physical, bodily life is also clearly seen in the Fourth Petition of the prayer that Jesus taught us: Give us this day our daily bread. Jesus wants to feed us. He wants us to have our daily bread and he invites us to petition our heavenly Father for our daily sustenance. But as Jesus reminds us, we cannot live by that bread alone.

At the beginning of his public ministry, when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he was hungry, too. After 40 days of fasting, Satan's very first temptation was to challenge Jesus to use his miraculous power to turn stones into bread. But quoting the Word of God, Jesus declared: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Why can we not live on bread alone? It's because we have another mouth to feed, another life to sustain. You can call it "spiritual life" or "life with God".

When God created the first people of the human race, he endowed them with both kinds of life, bodily and spiritual life. The beginning of that bodily life is described in Genesis, chapter 2 when God formed the first man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The spiritual life given to Adam and Eve is also described in Genesis where the picture of perfect harmony with God, with one another, and with nature is clearly seen. But that spiritual harmony was shattered when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. Listening to the voice of Satan, they yielded to his temptation and immediately lost their spiritual life. Their relationship with God was destroyed.

Adam and Eve died spiritually that very day, being driven from God's garden and from His presence — and eventually they would lose their bodily life as well. Ever since that awful fall, every person born into this world is alive in body, but dead in the soul — “dead in...transgressions and sins” as St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1. To be spiritually dead means having no heartbeat for God -- no saving knowledge of him, no relationship with him.

So every person born into this world is in desperate need of being born again if he or she is to enter the kingdom of heaven. God's Son came to our world as a human being to give us this spiritual life again. That is the clear teaching of the New Testament. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life.”

In John 10:10 Jesus says: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, in all its fullness.” The Son of God achieved this goal by dying on the cross both physically and spiritually, and by rising again from the grave. Jesus not only suffered physical torture and death, but he was also separated spiritually from his heavenly Father, forsaken and abandoned, experiencing the depths of hell from the cross itself. But because his life was innocent, given in perfect love and obedience to his Father's will, Jesus rose again from the grave. And now God's kind of life is once again available for everyone, abundantly and eternally.

In today's Old Testament lesson we heard God's gracious invitation: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich food.”

Our spiritual life is nourished by listening diligently to God, by eating the food of His Word, which is ours without cost, free of charge.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares: “The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” We eat this bread when we use the means of grace that God has given us: Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the words of Law and Gospel proclaimed in Scripture. Whoever eats this bread from heaven receives the “food that endures to eternal life”. He or she will never go hungry.

The response of faith to this good news is to desire this food regularly. I pray that you will always desire to receive the food that gives you spiritual life — The water of Life in Holy Baptism gave you

new life, the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood sustains your spiritual life, and God's word of life written in the Bible nourishes your soul week after week. This is the only food that will sustain your life with God and keep you safe for eternal life. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.