

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Lent 4 (Reminiscere) – March 10, 2024**  
**John 6:1-15 – Living Bread**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

My goal today is to lead you to a deeper love and appreciation for the blessings you receive in the Lord's Supper, when you eat the lifegiving bread of Christ.

Three weeks ago, at the beginning of Lent, Jesus was fasting in the wilderness. He ate nothing for forty days, to teach us the lifegiving power of God's word. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

But today, the Lord who refused to eat bread feeds us with bread to the full. From five loaves and two fish, our Maker produces abundant food, the bread of life from heaven. We live not by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God. So today, God the Word, the word by whom the heavens were made, God speaks a word and breaks the bread, to fill us with life.

Two hundred denarii would not be enough to buy bread to feed five thousand men, besides women and children, but the empty-handed man from heaven opens wide his treasure house. He will break his own body like the bread in his hands, to give his flesh for the life of the world.

Jesus makes them sit down in a place where there is much grass. A place like the church, where the Good Shepherd is with us, to lead his flock to green pastures. Here in the church Jesus adds his word to the bread, "Take and eat, this is my body." By this word, he makes ordinary bread a rich sacrament.

That day, the crowds ate plain bread. But later in the same chapter, John 6, Jesus adds his word to the bread. And every word that comes from his mouth is brimming with life. He adds his word to give himself with it, the bread of life. Just as when he adds his word to plain water, to make it a baptism, that is, a lifegiving water, rich in grace, and a washing of renewal and rebirth.

The powerful word Jesus adds to the bread is this: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

And then he says again: "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

And again he says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

Whoever feeds on the bread of Jesus, the flesh of Jesus, whoever drinks the wine of his blood, truly he has the body of God in him. The lifeblood of God flows in his veins. This is not a metaphor. When you eat the bread of communion and drink the wine of the Lord's Supper, you receive God the Word, the risen Lord, into your body. He abides in you, to give you life.

"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. Whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

In the Old Testament, another man gave lifegiving bread to the hungry crowds, to save them from famine. Joseph in Genesis was sold into Egypt as a slave, to carry out God's purpose, and save a starving world. While in prison, Joseph interpreted the dreams of the chief baker and the chief cupbearer. The baker would be executed after three days, but the cupbearer would be restored in three days to Pharaoh's court. It was a double dream with a double meaning. Bread and wine, hunger and food, death and resurrection, images of the bread and wine of Christ.

The two dreams revealed that a new and better Joseph was coming. Like the chief baker, the Messiah would be killed. But like the chief cupbearer, his life will be restored. By dying and rising on the third day, our king of living bread will draw all nations to himself. As Egypt and the surrounding nations bowed down to Joseph, all nations will bow to Christ. But while Joseph charged a heavy price for his bread, Jesus offers bread without money and without price. His bread is better. And it is free. He pays to your account not two hundred denarii, not

a thousand, but everything he has, his whole life. From the cross he prepares for you no meager meal, but a rich banquet of heavenly bread and wine.

Again in the Old Testament, in Exodus, God saved his people from Egypt through the Passover. The firstborn sons were saved by the blood on the doorposts. They ate the meal of the slaughtered lamb and the unleavened bread. They drank and the wine of God's blessing. So Israel went out into the wilderness with Moses, where God fed them for forty years. He provided manna from heaven, gathered with the morning dew. Heavenly bread, white like coriander seed, like wafers made with honey.

So today, when Jesus feeds the five thousand, we read a strange little detail. "The Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand." John means that Jesus is the new Passover Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world by his blood. When this Lamb institutes his supper and testament at the Passover meal, he is pouring out his blood as wine for us to drink. He's going to the cross to give his flesh for the forgiveness of all our sins.

As for the manna that Moses gave the children of Israel in the wilderness, that bread did not last. Whoever ate it was hungry again. And if any manna was left over till the next day, it bred worms and stank. Manna was an image of better bread to come. A shadow of the new and greater prophet like Moses, of his bread of life from heaven.

All these things were hidden in the Old Testament, but they become clear in the New. The first Christians in the book of Acts began to understand them, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, as they worshipped daily in the temple. Every day the apostles opened to them the Scriptures, to show how everything in Moses and all the prophets bears witness to Christ. The believers recognized their risen Lord in the breaking of the bread. They saw in Jesus the new and greater Joseph, providing a far better store of grain for the life of the world. They saw in Jesus a new a greater Moses, giving manna from heaven that would never breed worms or stink. They saw in their risen Lord the lifegiving bread, the one who took bread and broke it, and gave it to them to eat, saying "This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins."

So daily, as they received his word, as the three thousand newly baptized souls in the book of Acts devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, they recognized Jesus in their midst in the breaking of the bread. And they were filled with awe at his gracious presence. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking the bread of communion in their homes, they received the living bread from heaven with glad and generous hearts. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Fill us, Lord Jesus, with that same lifegiving bread. Fill us with your flesh. For your flesh is true bread, and your blood is true drink. Your body is the body of God, which lives forever. Put your living flesh and blood into our mouth. Help us believe the forgiveness and life you give through this sacrament. Sustain us with heavenly bread for our whole earthly life. Prepare your table before us, with bread of your goodness, and make our cup overflow. We hunger and thirst for your righteousness, Good Shepherd. Satisfy us with your goodness and mercy, so we may dwell in your house forever.

"Sir, give us this bread always." Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.