**March 10th 2024 Laetare Sunday**

**Text: John 6:24-36** 0709

**Theme: Seeking the Lord.**

May the Lord our Savior ever grant us mercy and grace according to His lovingkindness. Amen.Dear children of God: There are many ills that plague our country and society today. Many hot political topics revolve around the role government plays in caring for the poor and needy of this country. Trillions of dollars are spent each and every year in an effort to alleviate the suffering and want of many in our country. Politicians seek to stimulate economic growth by doling out millions of dollars that are meant to create jobs and help the poor. The government has determined that they will provide medical care and food to those who cannot support themselves, creating the highest numbers of welfare participants in the history of the country. Now without getting into the politics of such things we can see firsthand what becomes of a people who rely on government for their daily needs. We are witnesses to one of the most entitled generations that has ever lived. Men believing that they have a right to money and goods that they have not earned; men living a life of ease and idleness, expecting others to care for them and their families. The purpose of saying these things is not to discourage giving to the poor, for that is a very noble thing on the part of men, it is even commanded in Scripture, but the purpose is to show what kind of spirit is engendered when handouts are given and men come to other men with a spirit of entitlement. This spirit is spoken of by Paul concerning the care of widows, he says: *“But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house.” (1 Tim. 5:11-13)* What Paul is saying is that if the church, or a man, give unto the poor and needy without engendering a sense of responsibility for their own needs, he does nothing but create an idle free-loader. A person who moves from house to house receiving goods and food at the hand of kind men and women until they have exhausted the source and then they move on to the next source. This should not be dear Christians. There is a difference between helping the poor with a view to eventual personal responisbility, and a never ending leeching off of someone else. The old proverb fits well: “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.”

What has been said, concerning giving to the poor and needy, was said to observe the spirit of the fallen nature of mankind. Men are by nature belly servers. Our sin has engendered in us a spirit of entitlement; we feel that we are owed our daily bread. We often become bitter with our God if we receive less than we think we deserve; or if it is not the quality which we feel we deserve. This same spirit was seen amongst the Israelites during their forty year wandering in the wilderness. They had complained bitterly against God and Moses for bringing them out into the wilderness only to let them die of hunger. God in His great mercy does not destroy them for their complaint, but sends unto them bread from heaven, manna. Yet the spirit of entitlement arose again, we hear: *“And the people spake against God, and against Moses, wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.” (Num. 21:5)* They were no longer content to eat of things God had provided, but wanted something fresh and different provided by the hand of God. We can often see this selfsame spirit in the churches of today. Men and women come to the house of God seeking the Lord for their own bellies. Desiring that God provide them with more things, or better things; to ask God that He give them something more than He has provided for their lives. Their soul loathes the light bread from heaven, and they want something new, something different. Therefore we will consider today those who seek the Lord, and the different spirits which prevail among those who come unto Him. This we will see in our text for today which is found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse twenty four.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, dearest Lord Jesus Christ, we confess unto Thee that all too often we have approached unto Thee as did the Jews seeking only bread for our bellies. Teach us by Thy Word that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of Thy mouth. This is the true bread which can give and sustain life. Give us of that that true bread, dear Lord, that we may nevermore hunger. Take not Thy Gospel from us causing a famine of Thy Word, but give it unto us liberally and abundantly that we may eat to the full and be satisfied. Teach us this day to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto us. Thou art truly the source of all good things, even our daily bread, but cause us to come unto Thee primarily for the feeding of our souls unto life everlasting. Grant unto us these things for Thy glory alone. Amen.

Guided by the Spirit of God let see that men often seek the Lord:

1. **For bread that sustains life.** We read verses twenty four through thirty one of our text: **read verses here.** In our Gospel lesson for today we heard the story of Christ’s miraculous feeding of the five thousand. It was truly an incredible deed which He performed for those men that had come to hear Him teach. Like unto the Israelites of old these Jews had received bread for their stomachs from heaven itself. It was not manna, but the bread of earth which Jesus had turned into enough food for five thousand from five loaves and two fish. Hardly enough to feed a few, yet made enough to feed them all with more left over than they began with. This story takes place the evening before our text, and those that come seeking for Jesus are the same men who had witnessed and ate of the miraculous bread. Yet they came not seeking more instruction from the Lord, but to receive more bread at His hand. In their minds they had found an infinite source of food, for which they need not labor. After Jesus fed the multitude, we hear: *“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.” (John 6:15)* Jesus knew that these men had received the bread not in thankfulness to God for His open hand of abundance in earthly things, but they received with the spirit of idleness hoping to make Jesus their king so that He would provide food for them, and they would never hunger nor labor for it. In their eyes this was the answer to all the social ills of their day. This Man could be our king and provide easily for all His subjects and Israel would prosper. If we take the thoughts of the Jews and put ourselves in their place, in our day, would this not be wonderful. To have a king who could provide bread and meat miraculously to every person; they would eat to the full with plenty to spare! What a utopia would then result from this! Yet Christ knowing what was truly necessary tells them that they seek Him only for their own bellies; only because they saw the miracle and wanted more. How often do we approach God in prayer with this same attitude and spirit? We come to Him in expectation that “our daily bread” come unto us without our labor; that God would give to us far more than we need; that He will not only fulfill our needs, but give unto us the best of the best. Thus each of us should earnestly examine ourselves to seeif we are come this dayto the house of Godwith the expectation that God provide us the good things of this life. If we find that indeed we come seeking not Jesus the Savior, but Jesus the Giver of bread, then we have come with a spirit that longs only for bread which perishes. This was the main theme of the miracle which Christ performed and His subsequent teaching in our text, that is, to point away from the things of this life and point to the things of God.

God is truly the Provider of all things on this earth including the bread which we eat daily, and we can and should ask and thank Him for these wonderful gifts. However, that is not the primary purpose of God in our lives, and this because it is just temporary and perishable. The bread which we eat every day sustains life, but it does not give life. It will only sustain us for a short time before we must again eat and be sustained again for a short time. We hear: *“All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.” (Eccl. 6:7)* We are often told in Scripture to thank God for these gifts, but not spend much time concerning ourselves over them, nor looking to God and His Son for these things as their primary work toward man. For this reason Jesus says: *Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matt. 6:31-33)* Thus according to the words of our Lord and Savior we are not to seek the Lord for bread that sustains life, but we are to seek the Lord:

1. **For Bread that gives life.** We read verses thirty two through thirty six of our text: **Read verses here.** Our Savior endeavors to point these Jews from their belly serving nature and to Himself as the giver of Spiritual and everlasting life. These men were not concerned with the feeding of their souls, but the feeding of their stomachs. Jesus tells them that the Father giveth them the true bread from heaven, that is He giveth them the Bread of life which can save their soul from death. Christ seeks to give them life through Himself; He seeks to engender in them a right spirit of seeking the Lord for that which is truly needful. The bread of earth only sustains life temporarily on earth, but the bread which Christ offered to them in His teaching the day before, and that which was represented by the miraculous feeding actually gives life to a soul. What could be more important? To drive the point home, and to answer their request for a sign, He tells them that He is the Bread of Life sent down to men from the Father. If they had seen in the feeding of the multitude, not simply a Man that could feed their bellies, but the Savior who could feed their souls with everlasting life, they would have come seeking forgiveness, life, and salvation, rather than bread. Jesus says later in this same chapter of John: *“I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.” (John 6:48-50)* He establishes with His Word what He had performed before their eyes. A gracious Word of life which gives life to the dead soul; the soul that is dead in trespasses and sins is regenerated and born again by the true bread of heaven, and thus that soul will never die, for he is saved. This text and chapter of John is often confused as teaching of the Lord’s Suppereating the bread and body of Christ, but we must remember that at this point Jesus had not yet instituted the Lord’s Supper, thus this sermon of Christ points not to the grace offered in the sacrament, but the grace offered through the Gospel, from which the sacrament derives its power. Christ is pointing these men, and us, to Himself as the bread for which we should ask God. We should be coming to church, having devotions, studying God’s Word to seek after the life-giving Bread of heaven. God will indeed give us our daily bread, but His primary work toward men is to give Bread which gives life to their soul. And those who thus seek the Lord will be filled, as He said: *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6)* As occurred at the feeding of the five thousand, those who are made to sit down in the Church of God will be filled with the Bread of life and there will be gathered of the leftovers an abundance. There is never a lack of grace and truth to be found in the Word of God; it will more than fill any who come hungering after the Bread of Life. It is freely given, nothing is required of us to receive it. For God gives liberally unto us of His mercy and grace. What is here spoken of is none other than the faith of God which He works through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who seek after righteousness are those who believe on Him and are saved.

Unto us is this very grace given. We are fed abundantly of that Bread from heaven, let us never turn again seeking the bread which perishes, but the Bread which gives and sustains life forever. And thus will be fulfilled the words of Isaiah: *“Say to the prisoners, go forth; to them that are in darkness, show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.” (Is. 49:9-10)* What those men sought after in our text: abundant and free-flowing bread from Jesus, we actually receive in spiritual Bread from heaven. Therefore we receive the promise and invitation of God to His table, saying: *“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” (Is. 55:1-3)* Let us then come unto the Lord for grace and mercy; to forgive our sins, revive our souls, and lead us to everlasting life. “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” Amen.