**Text: Exodus 16:2-15, Ephesians 4:1-16, John 6:22-35**

Sir, Give Us This Bread Always

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Unity is a powerful thing. When people come together, in search of a common goal, the results can be astounding. There are places in this world, where, when people come together, suddenly all of the barriers that make us unique start to break down. Take sporting events for example. The only divisive thing at a sporting event is that there are two groups of people rooting for different teams. Once you enter those gates, you have a common interest, to see your team win, that is shared by other people. Sporting events can turn complete strangers into best friends throughout the course of a game. When you’re sitting in your seat, you don’t see the person next to you don’t get the wealth of information from them that you otherwise would outside of the stadium. You don’t know what kind of car they drive, you don’t know how big their house is, you don’t even know if they live 10 minutes from here or if they live across the country. The only thing you can tell right off the bat is whether they are a fan of your team or the other guys. It creates a comradery that is seldom found in other places. Concerts are another example of this as you find yourself sharing a common interest with a large group of other people. These events aren’t about where you’re from, what your social status is, or what your job is. All of that information is pushed to the side because it doesn’t matter how much money you have when you’re singing your favorite band’s song or rooting for your team. My fondest memories often include sporting events or concerts. When my brother and I went into a Penn State game, we didn’t fight with one another. I didn’t get into fights with my parents inside of the stadium. No instead we put all of our differences aside and we became equals, to an extent. We each wanted the same thing, and we each shared the same view. That was honestly the reason why some of my favorite memories of playing football came from the misery that was camp. The reason why was because no matter what position you played, no matter whether class you were a part of, you were tired, you were sore, and you were miserable. I think that’s part of the reason why it was so fun. We were all equals in our pain and misery and we could share that and support one another because we knew what everyone else was going through.

Yet, today there are fewer and fewer things that we can all agree on, and it seems as though that list is getting shorter and shorter. Even our sports have started to become places of division, more so than they were. But division is the center of the human story, even going back to the garden of Eden. Humanity has used division to define its relationship with God, for the sin of Adam and Eve caused a rift in our relationship with God. When we look at scripture we see that God does everything in his power in order to repair the separation that man caused when we fell into sin. One great example of this in the Old Testament is the story of the Exodus. For it was through this story that God sought to be united with his people in the land that he would give to them. God was the one that lead them out of Egypt. God was the one who had protected them from the great armies of Pharaoh. God was the one who caused the great wind to separate the sea in order that his people might cross it on dry land. It was God that raised the status of Israel from a nation of slaves, to a nation with their own lands. Our Old Testament reading for today comes from this story. In fact, the story of the crossing of the Red Sea happened a mere two chapters before this, in chapter 14. So we are looking at the mindset of Israel in the immediate aftermath of witnessing the plagues that were sent upon Egypt, as well as the destruction of Pharaoh’s armies, all of which was done before their eyes on their behalf. Yet the mind of Israel is set upon division, not upon unity. The people of Israel find themselves dissatisfied and they cry out, “**Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.**” Wow. What a statement that is, for the people of Israel tell Moses that they would’ve rather had God end their lives in Egypt than escape. They would’ve rather died as slaves because when they were slaves at least they got three squares a day. It’s such a ridiculous statement that it really boggles the mind. After all, they had just crossed the Red Sea, and God had spared them from being slaughtered at the hands of Pharaoh and his army. Yet here they are, grumbling that they would’ve rather died. They would rather not be God’s people, and be dead, than be God’s people, and be hungry. I think that sometimes we fill this role rather admirably. It doesn’t take much for us to throw up our hands and cry that God and the world are against us, no matter what the positives are. It doesn’t take much for us to become distracted and lose sight of the wonders that God has done in our lives because of our own suffering. The crowd from our Gospel lesson is similar in that they come to Jesus simply for food. Earlier in this chapter was John’s account of the feeding of the 5000, in which Jesus displayed his true, divine power. Jesus says, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.**” In other words, these people were not coming to Jesus because they were witnesses to his divine power. Rather they had come for food.

Jesus tells them, “**Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.**” Do not work for the food that perishes…how wonderful that words spoken over 2000 years ago speak to us with the same force with which they were delivered. Why is it that working, simply for things that are perishable, is not something to strive for? Because things will always perish. The food you buy at the store has an expiration date. Go to a scrap yard or a landfill. How many of us are driving our first car? The things of the earth will always perish, and that even includes the things that bring us together. In 100 years, we might not care about who won the Super Bowl or who was president. In 100 years, the world will most likely look completely different than it does now. How do I know this? Because look back at how life was in 1918. In 1918 the most devastating war the planet had ever seen was coming to an end. A war that saw leaps and bounds in technology compared to the century before it. Yet 20 years later, by 1938, that technology had become obsolete. And 7 years after that technology took another leap as we discovered the ability to harness atomic energy into a weapon. Certainly, those of you that lived through the 50s and the 60s have noticed the changes that have occurred. Life isn’t the same as it was because the things on earth are not everlasting, they change and decay. But Christ endures. Christ is everlasting. That is why Jesus tells them to seek the food which endures to eternal life. He is speaking of himself. When Jesus says, “**It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**” And the people cannot help but respond, “Yes! Give us that! And give it to us always.” This is the bread of life that our Lord offers to us. He offers us this bread so that we have a taste of something eternal. He offered himself for us so that we may one day find unity with him and with our God in heaven. But yet this bread he offers us brings us together now. That’s the beautiful thing about the church. As I said earlier, bringing people together is a wonderful thing. Breaking down the barriers that separate us can really make for something wonderful. And here, in the church, we find that the unity we have here breaks down all barriers. As Paul says, “**There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**” For not even at sporting events and concerts can you find a multi-millionaire sitting next to someone on food stamps, and what’s more, is that when they enter those doors, none of that external stuff matters. None of it. Because when you break it down, we have unity in two things here in this church. One, we are sinners in need of forgiveness. Our status is the same in the eyes of God. For as we stated here in the presence of God and one another, we are equal as sinners, we are each deserving of the same temporal and eternal punishment, separation from God. And two, Christ died for each and every one of those sins. Christ’s forgiveness doesn’t come to one of higher status more abundantly, it doesn’t have different effects on different races or genders or even ages. This is what the bread of life offers. It offers a true unity, a true equality because the death and resurrection of Christ isn’t set out more so for certain people no. It is set out for all people. All people. Every one, no matter what your background, is an heir to eternal life. The cross was not just for a select group, it was for all of humanity. And now our Lord and Savior offers us this bread, freely. He offers it here, at this altar, he offers us our daily bread, he offers us all that we need, in order that we may live in unity, a true unity, with the whole body of Christ, past, present and future. He offers us this so that we may have a true unity with him, and with the Father. That is what we find here, in this church, for as Paul states, “**And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**” So let us, as the unified body of Christ, give thanks to our God this day. Let us give thanks to him for bringing us together in our baptism, let us give thanks that he brings us together at this altar, where he feeds us. And let us give thanks that our Lord always, always, offers us the bread of life everlasting. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.