

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Title: “*By Giving Himself He Makes Himself Known*”

Sermon Text: John 6:26-27, 32-34

Sermon Hymn: “*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*” LSB 686

Prayer: May we always be comforted by who Jesus says He is.

Sermon Outline:

- I. The LORD persisted in giving Himself when the Israelites persisted in unbelief.
 - a. The LORD used miracles to direct them to Himself.
 - b. By what the LORD taught them He made Himself known to them.
- II. Jesus persisted in giving Himself when the crowd persisted in unbelief.
 - a. Jesus used miracles to direct the crowd to Himself.
 - b. By what Jesus taught He made Himself known to them.
- III. Our Lord persists when we persist in unbelief.
 - a. What He teaches us directs us to who He is.
 - b. Who He is directs us to what He teaches us.
- IV. In faith we ask ‘*man hu*’ (‘what is it?’).
 - a. Jesus answers, “*I am the Bread of life.*”
 - b. In faith and thanks we respond, “*Jesus, give us this bread always!*”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord, Jesus Christ, who keeps giving Himself, because that is exactly what we need. Amen.

We are going to do a little exercise or practice this morning (evening). You’ll likely think it’s silly and that I’m silly for making you do it, but I think it gets an important point across.

Before we do this, I want us to think about something. When we want others to look at something off in the distance, what do we usually do? We point. God gave us a finger, I usually call the pointy finger, to do just that.

Now, I’m going to point at something in this sanctuary. And, your instinct will be to look at what I’m pointing to. Don’t, I want you to go against your instinct. Instead, I want you to look my finger. Stare at my finger. Here goes.

While you are staring at my finger I am going to tell you what I’m pointing at:

(Behold, the Cross of Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God in the flesh. Immanuel, God with us. True God, true man. Conceived by the Holy

Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate. Died and was buried. Third day He rose again. He ascended into Heaven and sits at the Father's right hand. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.)

You can stop staring at my finger. Silly, isn't it? That I would point at something I want you to look at, but instead of looking at it, you look at my finger, even while I'm telling you what I'm pointing at. I know, I told you to. Silly and confusing, that's what it is, but I wanted to do this with you to make an important point which we'll get to in this sermon.

There is something else I want us to think about. And, that is this: Without true faith in Jesus Christ in who He says He is, you can make Jesus Christ to be anything and anyone you want Him to be. I'll repeat it. Without true faith in Jesus Christ in who He says He is, you can make Jesus Christ to be anything and anyone you want Him to be.

With these things in mind let's consider our Old Testament reading for this Sunday from Exodus 16, referred to in part I of the sermon outline under "the LORD persisted in giving Himself when the Israelites persisted in unbelief.

Up to this point the Israelites had witnessed and experienced many miraculous, gracious, and merciful acts of the LORD. These were His people and He had a very special place to take them and a very special purpose to fulfill through them. The events from breaking down Pharaoh and His power over them, to leading them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, into the wilderness, the miracle of water at Marah.

What was the purpose of these miracles done by the LORD anyway? To begin, the LORD has something big to fulfill, His plan to save everyone. In order for these people to reach the land Promised to them the LORD had to intervene in the events of their lives in miraculous ways. The LORD had a long term, an eternal plan behind it all. That the Son of God would become flesh and miraculously free all people of the world from the bondage of sin and death.

These miracles had this purpose, and at the same time they also served as pointers. They were designed to direct these people's attention upon the LORD and His Word of Promise to them.

Point 'a' in the sermon outline, the LORD used miracles to direct them to Himself. And, here is where it becomes very interesting and comforting. By directing attention to Himself, the LORD was also directing attention to what He was teaching them. And, by teaching them He was making Himself known to them. Both happen at the same time. You don't find one without the other.

Yet, there was a problem for these people of Israel. We see this illustrated in verses 2 and 3 of our Old Testament reading. Even after all these miracles, “the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, ‘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.’”

Why would they say such a thing? They had witnessed the LORD do so many miraculous things up to this point. Sure, now they were in a barren land with little to eat and drink. Their situation seemed impossible, yet so was their situation in Egypt. You would think they would have no problem with trusting the LORD to bring them through this tough time. In fact, they were so lacking in faith in the LORD’s Promise to them that they would have rather died in Egypt.

The amazing thing is, the LORD persisted. The problem the Israelites had was unbelief. They did not believe the Word of the LORD and His promise. Sure every time they witnessed a miracle performed by the LORD they were filled with amazement, but that did not change their unbelief.

Without true faith in the LORD, these Israelite people made Him to be whatever they wanted Him to be. To them, because of their lack of faith, the LORD was only there to fulfill their immediate needs. “Give me food, give me water, give me riches!” What they needed was the LORD to reveal Himself to them, to make Himself known to them, and that is what He’d been doing all along.

Let’s now consider our Gospel reading, a very similar situation. This event follows the feeding of the 5000 men plus women and children with just five loaves of bread and two fish- amazing. Our text starts out with the day following. There was the crowd the disciples and Jesus. We remember that the disciples had traveled to the other side of the sea. While on sea they saw the Lord walking on water. Now the crowd remained on the other side. They had seen the disciples get in the boat without Jesus. But, they just had to get to the other side and follow. When they arrived they realized Jesus was already there. “Okay,” they thought, “Jesus didn’t get in the only boat we saw, yet He got across the sea somehow.” “Another miracle,” they thought. When they said to Jesus, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus said to them, “you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” Jesus was pointing out to them that they were not seeing the signs and the miracles for what they really were. Jesus intended for those miracles to point them to Him and who He said He was to

them. Yet, they had a problem, and their problem was the same as the problem the Israelites had in the wilderness, unbelief in what the LORD proclaimed concerning Himself.

Again, without true faith in Jesus Christ, you can make Him to be anything and anyone you want Him to be. To be even more specific, without true faith in Jesus Christ, you can give His miracles whatever purpose you want them to have. To these people of the crowd, the miracles they had experienced were simply for instant gratification and satisfaction. Just as Jesus said to them, “you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” “Hey, this guy can give us whatever we want, whenever we want,” they thought. “Let’s make Him our king!” Jesus knew this was their only desire for Him, to make Him an earthly king, and that is not at all what Jesus was about.

What kind of king would that be now? Because the unbelieving sinner cannot understand the kind of King Jesus is. He is the eternal king of the eternal Kingdom of God, which is not of this world. He was there to serve them with an eternal gift, the gift of Himself as the sacrifice to pay for their sins. This is what Jesus Christ is for those who have faith in Him in who He says He is. For those in unbelief, He is anything but.

Jesus’ purpose for His miracles was to direct the people’s attention to Himself. With the attention upon Him the attention was also upon what He was teaching them. What He was teaching them He would make Himself known. Through what He would teach them faith in Him would be created in their hearts.

Friends, Jesus knew of their unbelief, yet He did not give up on them. He persisted in doing the miracle of creating faith. He persisted in giving Himself. And, whenever the Lord gives Himself, He teaches. Anyone who knows the Lord came to know the Lord by what He teaches.

We come to part III on the sermon outline. ‘Our Lord persists when we persist in unbelief.’ Friends, there are a whole lot of times we persist in unbelief. Yes, even we, God’s children, have those moments when our faith is lacking, when unbelief fills our hearts. We are sinners. That is what we do. We sin by rejecting who our Lord is and by rejecting and ignoring what He teaches us concerning Himself.

As sinners we struggle. We get scared; we become worried about all sorts of things. What more, we easily lose sight of what our Lord promises us. There is no reason to fear death, He promises us eternal life in Heaven. We need not fear our sinfulness, He bore the guilt of our sin upon Himself and took it to the cross of death. This was our greatest need and He met it. Yet, we do, friends, at times reject or lose sight of this great promise.

What matters, however, is what our Lord does about this. He treats our rejection of Him by giving Himself. He treats our unbelief with faith creating through teachings concerning Himself.

You'll notice point a of part III of the sermon outline states, "what He teaches us directs us to who He is." And, point b states, "Who He is directs us to what He teaches." Basically, one thing directs us to the other, and the other directs us back to the one. Jesus' Word directs us to Him, and He directs us to His Word. This might sound confusing, but it's simple, and it's comforting.

For the Israelites out in the wilderness with Moses, for the people of that crowd with Jesus and the disciples that day, the same held true. The Lord makes Himself known by His Word, and His Word directs us back to Himself. If you receive the Lord's Word, you receive the Lord. If you receive the Lord, you receive His Word of Promise of who He is to you. You get both at the same time, the Lord and His Word of Promise cannot, and shall not be separated.

For those people in our Old Testament reading and in our Gospel, their focus was upon the miracles themselves. They were staring at the finger, that which the Lord was using to direct them to Himself. The problem they had was their unbelief in who the Lord proclaimed Himself to be to them. And, in unbelief, you can make the Lord to be whoever you want Him to be, but never who He says is.

How does the Lord solve our problem of unbelief when it arises, He gives Himself. He does so by teaching us, which directs us to Him. And, He Himself directs us to what He teaches.

It appears, the way our Lord solves our problem of unbelief is a miracle. It is a way in which the Lord creates the faith in dead-in-faith people. It is a way in which He makes spiritually alive those who are spiritually dead. It is a miracle. And, it is the miracle that directs us to the greatest miracle of all, Jesus' own Resurrection!

In faith, the faith the Holy Spirit has created in our hearts through our Lord's Word of Promise to us, we gaze upon our Resurrected Lord. And, gazing upon our Resurrected Lord, He teaches all that we need to know concerning who He is. And, who He is is exactly what we need, a Savior from sin and death and a giver of eternal life.

When the LORD provided the bread from heaven for the Israelites, they asked 'man hu?' 'Manna' is the combination of the Hebrew words, 'what is it?' When we are comforted by the Promise the Lord gives of the forgiveness of our sins, we are able to gaze upon the gift of Jesus Christ ask

in faith, 'what is it?' And, the Lord is always ready to teach us, "I am the Bread of Life."

We live in this reality. Amen.