

August 1, 2021

St. John 6:22-35

“So, Which Is It Going to Be?”

- I. Earthly Stuff?
- II. Good Works? (28-29)
- III. How About the End of Hunger and Thirst?

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

St. John 6:22-35

Dear Friends in Christ,

Everybody wants to be happy. The problem is that most everything of this world that makes us happy will change, or disappoint, or go away. And for many, trying to be happy is simply doing whatever it takes to survive each day.

The Psalmist teaches, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Ps.73:26) Paul teaches, "Set your minds (your thinking) on things above, not on things that are on earth." (Col. 3:2) And John teaches, "Do not love the world or the things in the world... (I Jn. 2:1) That is, do not sacrifice what we have in Christ for anything of this world. In Christ, and with His Word in front of us, we can be a source of comfort, strength and hope for others.

The fourth stanza of the sermon hymn, "What is the World to Me", puts everything in perspective:

What is the world to me! My Jesus is my treasure, My life, my health, my wealth, My friend, My love, my pleasure, my joy, my crown, my all, My bliss eternally. Once more, then, I declare: What is the world to me!

The pastors are blessed to be in touch with those words whenever we are allowed to minister to a brother or sister traveling the end of life's journey. They're especially meaningful when standing next to a very small casket. All this leads to the question . . .

SO, WHICH IS IT GOING TO BE?

I. Earthly Stuff?

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you. For on him God has set his seal. (vv. 25-28)

The miracles testified to who Jesus was and is: God in the flesh; the only One Who could secure everlasting life for them and us. But the people weren't interested in the eternal issue. They were interested in earthly food - earthly stuff.

As I thought about this, I recalled the story from years ago about a baseball player known as Pepper Martin who played for the St. Louis Cardinals and was a hero of the 1931 World Series. You might recall that he was asked, "What is your chief ambition?" He answered, "My chief ambition is to go to heaven!" The questioner laughed and then said, "You want to play the harp, eh?" Pepper Martin responded by saying, "Mister, I don't think that's funny. People don't want to be ignoble, I guess, but they surely are so without thinking. If there is anything foolish about reading the Bible every day and believing its contents; if there's anything funny about wanting to enter heaven when you leave this life, then I'm afraid that life in this world is not worth living."

It's obvious, don't you think? Pepper Martin grasped the words of Jesus: "Do not work for food that spoils." Jesus isn't saying, "Quit work and do nothing." He's saying, "This world, with its *stuff*, is not your goal." Lutheran commentator, Gary Baumler observed:

People can eat only a certain amount of food, and they usually need less than they eat. What's left eventually spoils. In the hot Mediterranean climate without modern refrigeration, food would not keep all that long. So Jesus warned the people not to focus all their energies on getting food that spoils, but...food that endures to eternal life. (Gary P. Baumler, John, People's Bible Commentary, St. Louis, CPH, p. 96)

Well it's obvious: Earthly stuff "spoils". It grows old, or rots and decays, or gets broken, or is replaced by an improved something, or becomes boring. You name it! And sometimes people run after it to the point of absurdity.

II. Good Works? (28-29)

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (vv28-29)

The question these people asked is the question many ask, one way or another: "What must we do?" You know: "What must I do?" "How do I get God to love me?" "How can I be sure God accepts me?" "What must I do to pay for my incomprehensible number of awful thoughts and words and deeds?"

P. E. Kretzmann writes:

They were caught in the idea that there must be some merit on their part, that they must perform something for their salvation. But Jesus corrects that notion. There is only one thing which they should do, and that is to believe on Him whom God has sent." (P. E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I., p. 442)

I do understand: Most of this world could care less about Jesus. And something else: The concern about what happens after death mostly drowns in the sea of, "What I think and have and do of this world comprise the great reality." Unfortunately, it isn't the eternal reality. The step into death is! Without Christ it is the step into eternal horror! This must never be the case for us. As Paul writes:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace..." (Eph. 1:3-5,7)

III. How About the End of Hunger and Thirst?

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may believe you?" What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, 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." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (vv 30-35)

The fact is, the manna God fed the Israelites pointed to the Bread of Heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ. Everybody wants fullness of life, but it's not here. Nothing here fills for very long. Nothing. I found myself recalling the words of the late Romanian Lutheran pastor, Richard Wurmbrand: "If nothing follows (after death), the most beautiful life is nothing more than a banquet offered to a condemned man before his execution."

The fact is, we have been invited to the eternal wedding banquet - the unending feast - invited by the One Who declared, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever

believes in me shall never thirst.” And that points to, “...whoever believes in (Jesus) should not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16) - unending life and fullness of joy and peace.

You might remember the account of a man by the name of William James Taylor, alias Bill Henessy, alias Ed Lynch, alias Tom O'Brien. He learned that he could not hide from God. By the age of twelve William James Taylor was a street urchin. Later, gambling and drugs made him a fugitive from the law. He was always on the run.

The night he arrived in Chicago he ran into what was then known as The Pacific Garden Mission. He ran inside in order to avoid what he thought were the suspicious glances of a policeman. Once inside the Mission he heard the Gospel of Jesus. He returned the next night and heard the same thing. William Taylor was brought to faith in Christ. He is reported to have said this: “I cannot tell all that Jesus has done for me. But one thing I can do is tell others about Him. And there's a lot of things I don't know. But there is one thing I do know. And it's this: God ain't any picker of persons.”

Well, as William Taylor said, *God ain't!* He picked us! When it comes to running with the world or running with Jesus the question is always there: **So, which is it going to be?** Thank the Lord for pointing us in the right direction.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott