

Thanksgiving Service  
Hope Lutheran Church  
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Bread of Heaven

Happy Thanksgiving! I don't know about all of you, but thanksgiving is a day that I look forward to every single year. For some people, it's just another day, and if that's you, that's perfectly fine. But for those of you, like me, who love thanksgiving, your mind is probably on one thing right now.

#### THE MEAL!

Are you thinking about it now? And why shouldn't you be? In so many ways, Thanksgiving really is about THE MEAL. It's delicious! I'm hungry just thinking about it.

So let's just take a pole here. I want to know your favorite part of Thanksgiving dinner. By a show of hands, whose favorite part is...the turkey? Stuffing? Green bean casserole? Pie?

Now are you hungry? For those of us who love Thanksgiving, who dream about it every year, that epic, amazing meal is one of main highlights of our year.

But there's something interesting about thanksgiving. While the meal is going on, it's the most incredible meal you've ever eaten. But...can you still taste last year's thanksgiving meal? Can you go back five years and still taste that food in your mouth?

That brings us to our main point! Even though Thanksgiving Day is this incredible tradition, and the food is always amazing, after it's gone, it's gone! And our memory of that experience starts to fade as we begin to look forward to another amazing meal the next year. Even the best food is only temporary.

This is exactly the kind of thing that Jesus addresses in our Gospel text for today. And I think it's worth our time to walk through this a bit together. Jesus says "I am the bread of life!" It's still all about food, right? But what kind of food is Jesus talking about here?

You see, right before today's reading, Jesus had just provided a meal. To those who had experienced it, it was nothing short of astonishing! Jesus had fed 5000 people with just a few loaves of bread and some fish. Now that might not sound like the makings of a Thanksgiving Dinner, but to the people who saw it, it was incredible! They ate their fill! Seemingly out of nowhere, Jesus had provided for their physical need for food, and now, they wanted more of that!

But is that all Jesus is good for? Is Jesus simply a divine grocery store? Was Jesus' mission only to feed the hungry?

That seems to be what his hearers thought in the text, but Jesus calls them on it. The crowds are looking for more food, but Jesus challenges them to look for food that will give them eternal life. The crowds respond in verse 30 by saying "What sign do you do, that we may see and believe in you?" What sign? What about the one Jesus has just performed?

The feeding of the 5000 was performed, not simply to feed a bunch of hungry people, but as a sign. This miracle was a giant, glowing sign pointing to Jesus, saying "This is someone worth believing in!"

And why is Jesus worth believing in? Why is Jesus worth following? What's so special about Jesus? Because he feeds us?

In verse 35, Jesus says "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Now I have to admit that this is difficult for me to understand. In some way, Jesus feeds us in a way that's so much better than how physical food feeds us. But how does Jesus do that? How does Jesus feed us? I recently had an experience with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade youth group at Hope, and they really helped me to understand this. We were going through this same Bible story together last Wednesday, and they really understood what spiritual hunger is all about. They really seemed to understand that everyone, whether they know it or not, has a hunger for God, a spiritual hunger. So I asked them if they knew of ways that people without Jesus try to feed their spiritual hunger. And you know what? They were really insightful! Some of them said that without Jesus, people turn to alcohol to feed that spiritual hunger. Without Jesus, some people try to feed the hunger with drugs or with entertainment. Some people try to feed their hunger with unhealthy relationships. You see, the kids got it! And they helped me to see that if we try to

feed our need for Jesus with anything but Jesus, it isn't going to work! Imagine if you were lost in the middle of a desert, starving to death with no food or water. If someone tried to keep you alive, to bring you out of that starvation by feeding you garbage, it just wouldn't work!

But the truth is that we're all dying. We may not be dying of physical starvation, but death is inevitable for all of us. We're all running from it, trying to cheat it, trying to keep it at bay, but the truth is that it's chasing after us all. That reality confronts the crowds that are seeking Jesus in our Gospel lesson. Sure, physical food is great, but for how long? How long can food sustain us? Death is unavoidable. And there's only one thing that will bring us through it. There's only one person with enough strength and love to give us the food that will sustain us through that grim reality. That person is Jesus. The food that he gives us is himself.

That's what our Gospel lesson tells us. That's the central point that Jesus is getting at. Jesus tells us that the bread of life is the one sent down from heaven to give life to the world. That's him! That's what each miracle, each sign, each wonder points to. Jesus isn't a magician with cheap tricks, here today, gone tomorrow. Jesus lives eternally, risen from the dead, and with him, we too shall live. I can't say it any clearer than that. If you understand that point, then you'll say with the crowds in our text "Jesus, give us this food always!"

And that's exactly what Jesus does. Always, every time, without fail, Jesus feeds us whenever we come to him. When we come to him in simple faith, that's all God requires. When we come to Jesus, trusting that nothing, not even death can separate us from him, we fulfill God's work. In Jesus, we have life, lasting, eternal life. Jesus promises us that. He will never turn us away. When we come to Him, in faith in His words of promise and forgiveness, we are truly fed. That's the Gospel, isn't it? The Gospel is a sweet, rich, and nourishing food, one that sustains and satisfies us, through all manner of trial and hardship! Each Sunday when we set foot in our Lord's house, each time we come, not to a Thanksgiving table, but to His table, we experience that satisfying and rich food, the food that promises eternal life and salvation to all who trust. That food is Jesus. And that food is for you.

I'm truly grateful for a savior who feeds me in that way. When I'm faced with sickness, or hurt, when I see trouble or chaos in the world around me, when I see death, I look at Jesus, and I see life. When I feel abandoned or alone, I look to the cross and the empty tomb, and I see a love beyond comprehension from a savior who gives me life. When the world around me seems to crumble and fade, when all the temporary things that I put stock in fail me, I look to Jesus and I see an eternal security that promises me a life beyond the temporary stuff of this world. May you eat today and every day, satisfied and full of the bread of heaven, the food that leads to eternal life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.