

Proper 15B (Pentecost 11)

Text: John 6:51-59

Title: Bread and Miracles

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Two things. There were two things that the crowd wanted from Jesus. Remember, they tracked him down. They followed him across the sea. They came from miles around to be with Jesus. And there were two things that the crowd wanted from Jesus.

Bread and miracles. Those were the two things. Bread and miracles.

They wanted someone to provide for them, a meal ticket. Jesus had used five loaves to feed five thousand. If they hung around Jesus, they would be set for life. They wouldn't have to work. They wouldn't have to cook. They would never have to worry about where the next meal came from. They wanted more bread.

And they wanted miracles. They wanted a sign. They wanted to be entertained by a show of the miraculous, to witness the divine power that only Jesus had. They wanted proof that Jesus really had come down from heaven.

Bread and miracles. And that's what many folks are looking for from God these days. Bread and miracles. Food and entertainment. They want a God who can take care of their needs and who can put on a good show, a God who can prove His worth.

The churches that fill these same "felt needs" don't have a problem filling up the pews. The churches that promise wealth and prosperity and healing will always draw a crowd. People want a God who will take care of them, be their meal ticket.

And they want a God who can put on a good show, who can wow them, and entertain them, show up and do a decent miracle every now and again. And so churches that put on a good show will always be packed- churches with drama and screens and well produced and choreographed services, with profession bands and choirs where people can sit back and be entertained.

Two things: bread and miracles. That's what the people wanted then, and that's what people still want today. They want a God who will provide and who can put on a good show.

But Jesus did not give the people what they wanted. The feeding of the five thousand was a one-time event. Jesus did a few more miracles, but he didn't heal everyone, and when He did, He told people to be quiet and not tell anyone about it. Jesus did not want to be known as a bread and miracles guy.

When Jesus was on the cross, everyone was crying out for a miracle. Come down from the cross, save yourself. But Jesus didn't give everyone what they wanted.

And so that day in Galilee, when the people came looking for bread and miracles, and when Jesus refused to give them what they wanted they left.

The crowd left Jesus as quickly as they had come. They returned home and kept looking for the one who would give them what they wanted.

We like to think of Jesus as a popular guy, as someone who could always draw a crowd. But the crowd was fickle, and they when they didn't get what they wanted.

Jesus must have seemed like a colossal failure that day. He had over five thousand followers, over five thousand people who were hanging on His every word, who traveled for miles just to be around Him. He was a huge celebrity.

But when Jesus didn't give them what they wanted, when He refused to be their meal ticket and their entertainer, they left. Nearly all of them left. In a matter of minutes, Jesus' congregation went from 5,000 to twelve.

When they all leave, Jesus turns to the twelve and says, "Well, aren't you going to leave, too? Why are you still here?"

And Peter responds with his marvelous confession, the words of Peter we know best, the words we echo week after week before the Holy Gospel is read. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Jesus does not promise an endless supply of bread, and He doesn't guarantee to do more miracles. Instead, all Jesus has is His words.

To most people, words are pretty useless. "Talk is cheap" or so they say.

There is no shortage of words today. We are surrounded by words. Words in print, words over the airwaves, words in cyberspace.

Words fill books and magazines and newspapers. Words fill websites and blogs and text messages. Words fill radio and TV broadcasts.

You are bombarded every day with words- telemarketers and infomercials, salesmen and politicians. People use words to try to get you do what they want.

And so we are rightly skeptical of words. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. We have been mislead and lied to and manipulated by words so much, that we're not likely to believe what people have to say.

Words are pretty useless.

All Jesus has is His words. This is why so many people leave Jesus. All Jesus will give them is His words.

But the words of Jesus are no ordinary words. Jesus' words aren't like our words. Our words are empty and hollow. Our words make promises we can't keep. Our words lie and manipulate. Our words insult, tear down, kill and destroy. But not Jesus' words.

Jesus says, "The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life."

Jesus' words are living words. Jesus' words are alive, because Jesus Himself is the word. John begins his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Jesus is the Word.

When God interacts with this world, He does so through His words. When God made the world, He did so through His words. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Words did it all. He spoke creation into existence.

When God chose to dwell among His people, He took His word and wrapped it in human flesh. "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

Jesus was that Word made flesh. The Spirit and the life of God took human flesh and walked this earth. Jesus was the Word of God with feet and hands and eyes and a mouth. When people talked with Jesus, they heard the voice of God.

The words of Jesus still had that same creative power, that Spirit and life. His words cast out demons, stilled the storms, healed the sick and even raised the dead. Our words can't do that. Our words are empty and lifeless. Once they escape our lips they fall flat.

But not Jesus' words. Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. His words are Spirit and they are life. His words bring with them His divine life.

When Jesus speaks to the water, it becomes living water, water that bears His Spirit and life, recreating you as you are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus speaks to you each week, His words create and strengthen faith, forgive sins, and give His gifts of eternal life. We sing, "Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life." And then Jesus speaks to us. He has given us His words of Spirit and life.

His words give life, even to bread and wine, transforming them into His living flesh and blood.

Here at the altar, you taste the word made flesh. The words, that are spirit and life are now, once more, incarnate, enfleshed, for you. The

The flesh and blood of Jesus give you eternal life. Jesus says, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day." The flesh and blood of Jesus that you receive this day, give you eternal life.

It's the words that do it. Jesus words, spoken or sung to the bread and the wine, bear His Spirit and His life, and bring them to life. Here, then, you receive this life, these words of eternal life, that you can get nowhere else.

The crowds came to Jesus looking for two things: bread and miracles. Bread doesn't last. We learned that two weeks ago. And miracles may entertain or amaze for a moment, but they don't last either.

There is no shortage of places to go if you want to be fed or if you want to be entertained. Dinner and a show.

But Jesus has something better. Something only He can give. Jesus has the words of eternal life. Words in flesh and blood.

This is the place you can come to hear these words, to touch and to taste these words. Right here, right now, each and every week Jesus comes to speak life into your life. It's better than bread. It's better than any miracle. It's life that lasts forever.