

We are about to embark on a three-week sermon series in John 6. The verses we will cover deal with the aftermath of Jesus' miracle of feeding of the five thousand. We'll unpack what it means that Jesus is the bread of life, and how it is that we are to look for Him to care for us today.

The Roman poet Juvenal wrote in the late first century, "Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses." In short, Juvenal essentially stated that people in his day stopped caring about any higher purpose, they just wanted a full stomach and to be entertained.

I am so thankful you are here today, gathered in worship. But isn't our gathering here today a mystery? If the two most important things are bread and circuses, why are you here? The food you receive here is not going to fill your stomach, and I'm sure any number of activities could be more entertaining than this.

Apparently, people thought the same thing of Jesus. After Jesus crossed the sea to get away from the crowds, some people still managed to follow Him and find Him. **"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."** We might wonder today, 1. (oops!) Jesus, don't you know that people just need bread and circuses?

It has been said you can learn a lot about a culture based on its architecture. What are the biggest buildings in La Crosse? We have hospitals to the west that span multiple city blocks. A university just north of us whose campus is the size of a small town. Yet even today in a small city like La Crosse, we see the importance of bread and circuses.

Our civilization is built around bread. If you had to pick up some supplies for lunch after this service, how many supermarkets could you choose from? How big are those stores? If you didn't want to cook, how many choices do you have for a Sunday lunch at a restaurant?

Our civilization is built around circuses. The La Crosse Center just got a multi-million dollar renovation. The movie theater down the road from my house usually has a full lot. If an ancient person was teleported to your home, would he think your living room was a shrine to a god of black mirrors (aka a TV)?

But Pastor, 2. (ugh!) Is it so bad to get your fill of loaves? Someone once said, "I tried to quit eating, it was the worst four hours of my life!" The fact of life is that we need to eat and to drink. Are we really supposed to feel guilty that we have so many supermarkets and restaurants in town?

What else are we supposed to do? Go home from work and put on a burlap sack and read the Bible by candlelight until bedtime? The Bucks are the NBA champions! The Brewers are in the top three in the NL and top ten overall. In less than two weeks the Packers are going to be playing a pre-season game in 13 days, but who's counting? Are the circuses of this life really so bad?

The answer is no. To be a Christian doesn't mean to live under a rock and relegate yourself to a diet of saltine crackers and an entertainment lineup of Bible trivia and books from the church library. Jesus *did* feed the 5,000, after all. Bread and circuses aren't bad, but to be a Christian means to believe that 3. (aha!) Jesus knows how best to feed us. **“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. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”** THE BREAD OF LIFE FILLS US WITH MORE THAN JUST FOOD.

Jesus says of Himself, **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”** Jesus as the bread of life not only wants to give us bread and circuses, but He gives us something more. 4. (whee!) The Bread of Life reminds us of the source of our bread and circuses.

We pray in the Lord's Prayer that the Lord gives us this day our daily bread. In the Small Catechism, Luther explains what this means: “Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.” Your Heavenly Father provides the bread and circuses to sustain and enrich your life.

But that's not all that we pray for when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Luther also writes, “We pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” With every gift there is a giver, and Jesus wants us to turn our eyes heavenward where the best gifts come from.

Because even after a buffet when you're so stuffed you can't even think of food, the next morning you're scavenging the fridge. Because even with the Bucks being the NBA champs come October the next season will start, and on day one of the season they'll have the same win-loss record as the worst team in basketball.

Jesus refocuses our attention where we find our true life: **“Jesus then 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.”**” Jesus is this bread of life who came down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Apart from Jesus, life *would* be just a never-ending hunt for the next loaf of bread and the next circus. But Jesus breaks this cycle by entering into our world. By His life, death, and resurrection, He shows us a better way. 5. (yeah!) The Bread of Life feeds us with eternal life.

Jesus lived a perfect life for you. In Him we find a life worth living, and a life that was not simply running from one meal to the next and one attraction to the next. He spent His life caring for others, serving others, and loving others. And believing in Him, His perfect life is credited to your account, and you too may live such a life: caring, serving, and loving others.

Jesus died the perfect death for you. Because of His perfect life, death could not hold Him. By dying He destroyed death because death cannot swallow a sinless man. And we who believe in Him also need not fear death as we remain in this Bread of Life.

Jesus rose again, proving that you cannot kill the Bread of Life. He continues to feed His people and bring life to the world. We who trust in Him will never hunger or never thirst. This is not just talking about an earthly, physical hunger and thirst, but a deep, inner spiritual hunger and thirst. This is a hunger and thirst that is sated even today but will fully be satisfied on the day He calls us out of the graves to be with Him forever.

What does Jesus ask in return? The Work of God: “**This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.**” Simply believe and trust in this Bread of Life to give you your wants of body and soul. Trust in Him to forgive your sins. Trust in Him to save you.

Juvenal wrote that people, “anxiously [hope] for just two things: bread and circuses.” Thank you for gathering here today. We don’t have bread or circuses to offer today, but that’s not why you’re here. Today we gather to have an encounter with the Bread of Life, who certainly gives us our daily bread, but more importantly, He gives us a life and a hope that is more than just bread and circuses. He gives us a higher calling.

Dear Christian friends, let us rejoice when we do things that undermine the cult of bread and circuses. We confess who truly feeds us when we let our stomachs grumble an extra minute to say prayers before dinner. We confess who gives us true life when we forego that next TV episode to have a brief family devotion before bed. We confess who is truly eternal when we turn off the game at in the 5th inning so we can get to bed in time to be well rested for church. We challenge our culture’s true sense of fulfillment when little league or a fishing tournament takes a back seat to spend a precious hour or two in the presence of the one who feeds those who come to him and gives drink to those who believe in Him. Jesus as the Bread of Life means a life more than bread and circuses—it’s a life worth living. Amen.