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 Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Hartland, WI 53029
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 9th Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:24-35

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Monkey Bread or Jesus' Bread?

(this sermon was preceded by a children's sermon involving "monkey bread" and the story of Manna from Heaven from the Biblical book of Exodus.)

Today we're looking at the Gospel of John the sixth chapter.

It's the day after the miracle of Jesus feeding thousands of people starting out with only a handful of bread and fish,
 And now the crowds left behind on the shoreline are looking for Jesus. They lost sight of him when he did that walking on water thing, ... so the crowds who were on the shore have to go the long way around to catch up with him. But the surprise to me is that when those crowds do catch up with him, Jesus is kind of harsh with these folks. "I tell you the truth" he says, scanning the eager faces in front of him "I'm putting it to you bluntly. You've come looking for me not because you want to find God, but because I fed you, filled your stomach, and for free." (*The Message translation*)

ID think Jesus would be happy to see those crowds arriving, but Jesus isn't happy to see them. (This is why it's so important that you and I actually read the Bible ... and especially the Gospels, because a lot of times we think we know Jesus and surprise! By studying what he actually DID and said in real life in real time, we discover there's always more to him than we first realize.

And that's almost the definition of having a *living* relationship, isn't it?

If you don't know *anything* about someone then you don't have a relationship, but if you think you know *everything* about someone, if you no longer have the capacity to discover something new about each other, to occasionally surprise each other, then THAT is one boring and even dead relationship.

Well, I think Jesus surprises us all here, when he sees these big crowds coming around to find him, and instead of being happy to see them, he scolds them saying, you're just coming here to see me because you want some more monkey bread.

Isn't that what often happens in our "spiritual life"? When we come to worship aren't we thinking, "What can God do for me? How can going to church improve my life?" Scientific studies show that prayer can improve medical healing and lower your

cholesterol and give you obedient kids all in one swoop, (and those are good things!!) but we get... I think Jesus is saying so right here... we get way too excited about that.

Twelfth century mystic Meister Eckhardt warned that "Some people want to see God with their eyes as they see a cow, and to love him as they love their cow. They love their cow for the milk and cheese and profit it makes them. This is how it is with people who love God for the sake of outward wealth and inward comfort."

St. Augustine way back in the 4th century made a distinction between the Latin "uti" "frui". Uti - U T I stands at the root of our English word "utilize. And utensil. (a thing to use) Frui - F R U I is the Latin base for the English fruit or fruition. Augustine forcefully said that we can't Uti god, use Him, we can only enjoy God, -- frui -- God is not interested in a mechanical relationship with us, where we use God and church to our own purposes, even good purposes, like raising children well, or learning more about religion. God is interested in an organic, living relationship, where we & God become part of each other, through the living bread of Jesus.

Is God your cow? Is Jesus the answer to all your problems? Or is Jesus a living person with whom you have a living relationship?

Today in the Gospel of John, Jesus smashes this silly image of a handy, helpful god.

It seems to me there are sparks in his eyes when Jesus says if you're going to follow me, guys, you have to give up this idea of a God whose main job is to provide you with your next bowl of comfort food.

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But then Jesus turns right around and continues, and now we see, again, the Jesus of compassion: "Don't waste your energy looking for perishable food like that, folks." Says Jesus. Don't look for monkey bread that gets stale & hard & rancid,! Look for the bread that endures to eternal life.

You know Satan never liked that about Jesus, that he was so focused on things that last forever. Some of you have heard the internet story about

Satan challenging Jesus on who was better on the computer -- So God says, "Cool it! I am going to set up a test that will run two hours, and I will be the judge of who does the better job."

So Satan and Jesus sit down at the keyboards and type away. They write reports. They do spreadsheets & Powerpoints. They send emails. They send emails with attachments. They download pictures crop & color enhance them. They do every computer job there is. Then 10 minutes before their time is up, lightning suddenly flashes across the sky, thunder claps, the rain pours, and, of course, the electricity goes off & then flickers back on.

Each of them has to restart their computers. Satan starts searching frantically and screams, "It's gone! It's all gone! I lost everything when the power went off!" Meanwhile, Jesus quietly starts to print out all of his files from the past two hours of diligent work. Satan see this and becomes irate. "Wait! He cheated! How did he do it?" God shrugs and says, 2 words: "Jesus saves."

Do not work for food that spoils, for spreadsheets and PowerPoint documents that disappear in an instant, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you

It's only in your relationship with Jesus that your hard work, your relationships, your golden moments *and* your less than golden moments are cleaned up, edited, color enhanced, and only *then* also saved up for eternity.

I believe that through our relationship with Jesus, God saves up *all* the moments. There are a bunch of us in this church sending our first borns off to college in a few short weeks, so for graduation parties this summer, we've looked through the old pictures. Could it be that the moments with that little boy in the crib, that little girl on the tricycle, could it be that those moments are saved up in heaven?

Some of you have gone through a divorce or a family member has Alzheimer's... or you've served your country in a battlefield that few Hartland civilian can imagine -- could it be that those moments with your spouse, when you were first in love, or those bad times with your Mom, when she couldn't really remember what you had just told her, and it made you so mad... or the moment at training camp when you first realized that you could kill someone, you would kill someone... could it be that Jesus is redeeming those hours, cleaning them up with his own blood before saving them?

The crowds following Jesus are confused... they think it's for this life only that Jesus has come - to give them bread and power and a nice house and a perfect childhood for their kids & grandkids.

But Jesus tells them and us... that he's got something way more important: the bread which lasts, the bread which is an eternal relationship with the living God, who makes all things new, and saves them fresh and whole and pure, like a relationship that never gets old or sick, like living bread that never grows stale. Amen.