

**August 12 2012**

*Ephesians 4:25-5:2*

*John 6:24-35*

**Sermon**        *Looking for Bread and Circuses*

A quick little history lesson here. Prior to the time of Julius Caesar as many of you know, ancient Rome had gradually, through much turmoil and strife, had evolved from an ancient monarchy into a republic which was ruled under the auspice of elected officials through the Roman Senate. When civil war erupted under Caesar and continued after his death there was another period of change and there was another period of revolution which took place under Augustus as he emerged triumphant over all the others and became the first Emperor. So the republic went back to an imperial form of monarchy. Freedoms of all levels of society were more or less surrounded because of the fear of another horrible civil war might erupt. As the same time because the consolidation of small farms became large estates, and because of slave labor, and because of the development of a more urban economy there were large numbers of unemployed and underemployed people who flooded into the city of Rome. There was a time of much unrest and dissatisfaction among the aimless masses of people. So it sort of began under Augustus, a rule of thumb under many subsequent emperors, the way to pacify these restless people was to see that they had plenty of free food, plenty of free wine and plenty free forms of entertainment like those wonderful gladiatorial games to keep their minds off their lot in life.

That is sort of the principal that we work under here when you come to church; we have free food; we don't have free wine; but we have free drinks and of course you get lots of free entertainment on Sunday morning. Do you feel pacified? OK, I'm just checking in with you. Just checking in. Now as you also well know, after a while the short hand for the whole phenomenon was called bread and circuses. Food and drink and entertainment to keep those masses pacified, and it really depended on whoever was in power, and it worked with varied degrees of success down through the years for many kings, emperors, dictators from Augustus' time down to modern day with Hitler and with others even closer to our time.

My contentions are that human nature was not that different from the time of Jesus or among the Israelites of his day. And Jesus addressed this human attention for focusing on food, drink and entertainment and focusing on the material things in the midst of our journey of faith in today's lesson from John's Gospel. As I mentioned before with the boys and girls, the context of Jesus comments, here of

course, is his miracle of the feeding of the five thousand which is just prior to this passage that takes place in Scripture. Jesus is already being dogged by crowds, it appears not necessarily by the wisdom of his teaching but instead because of his miraculous healings that he had performed in their midst.

I'm sure this wasn't true of everyone who followed him around the countryside, but when we are ill and when we feel in desperate straits often times we are going to grasp at almost anything for hope in the midst of the difficulty and people did. But of more importance though in this story is the fact Jesus' reaction to what the crowd said in response to what he does sounds a bit harsh. This is indeed, this is the crowd's response to the prophet who came into the world and John's response is a harsh one. He believed that it is only because they have seen the miracle and they had eaten not because of what Jesus had said or did is why all of this made sense to them in their lives.

In the course of the next few verses, Jesus finds himself on the other side of the sea, but some of the group of that same bunch of people who had been part of the feeding miracle had tracked him down there and scolded him for moving on without telling them where he went. And this is the point of what Jesus said and does and lays it all on the line for those people about what exactly he thinks. He says they are not looking for him because they saw meaning or even the presence of God in what he said and what he did but why? He said instead, because of the miracle of the food that they had received; the bread and the circuses, the entertainment the food and the drink.

And then comes the first punch line that Jesus delivered about the meaning of the miracle. These words are familiar words." Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life which the Son of Man will give you." Of course they are still not so swift on the uptake; still confused and so they ask a series of questions to clarify Jesus statement, only to continue to miss the point entirely. What sign are you going to give us then that we set it and see it and believe in you? What work are you performing? And then as we heard in the past, they go on to recall the gift in the manna in the wilderness from God to the Children of Israel; forgetting entirely in what they had just seen him do and that through his life and that through his ministry; and through his teachings demonstrated to them exactly what the food that endures eternal life is all about. It can be found in God through Jesus. But they are still thinking of their stomach when they say, "Sir, give us this bread always." Which Jesus replies with a second punch line "I am the Bread of Life whoever comes to me will never be hungry whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

I guess in thinking about all these things, the question for us at this point is this- How are we any different from those crowds that followed Jesus desperately around after that miracle on that day? Do we understand any more clearly than

they, that the essence the very meaning of life is deeper and wider and far more profound than any concrete or material things in this world, far more profound than bread and circuses?

Sometimes I am not so sure, when I see where a good bit of the time, money and talent of most Christian people in our Society goes. And it isn't to possess the works of God in the world I am afraid. I'm not so sure when many folks say they are bored with life or don't get anything out of life rather than focusing on what they put into life. I'm not so sure when many Christians are drawn to more to rehearsed performance, and mega buildings and choirs and pastors like me (joke) rather than the message that is being preached. A message of hope and love, joy and goodness, forgiveness and peace and justice that Jesus came to bring. I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure.

So, I do hope and I do pray you and I won't be fooled, we won't be lulled into a sense of stupor and we won't be side tracked in some sort of shallow faith by bread and circuses. Remember these words of Jesus that he spoke in the context of this miracle. "I am the Bread of Life whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes me will never be thirsty." I think these are words for us to live by today, and not only for just today, but for each day of our lives.

So together we say AMEN