

John 6:22-35

A lot of people develop back problems. Chiropractors and physical therapists are in agreement as to why this is. Our world lies in front of us, not behind us. We read, write, use our cell phone, our computer, we work with our hands... All of these are done, not behind our backs, but before our eyes, in front of us. We reach forward pretty much all day long. This puts stress on our backs especially as we grow older.

This is also why we have spiritual problems. It's because our world lies in front of us. We see what we want in life and we go after it. We reach for things that are in front of us. We see an opportunity...a job, a career, a chance to make a good life for ourself. It's before us, and we reach for it. I'm not saying that this is wrong; but it is problematic. Pretty much everyone develops back problems sooner or later. And everyone also deals with spiritual problems. And both come because our world lies in front of us.

Listen to what Jesus says in our Gospel text for today: "*Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.*" Here is the problem as He points it out to us. The food that perishes lies before us. The food that endures to eternal life lies behind us. Our posture in life is a problem.

Our first parents did not have this problem. The Lord God was in front of them, before their eyes. It was God and His love for which they reached all the day long. But this changed when Adam and Eve reached for the forbidden fruit. This was sin. And sin locked them and all their children, including us, into a wretched posture. Now God and His loving grace is behind us, but the world with all of its allurements is before us. Yet this which lies before us is the food that perishes.

The people in our text were reaching for it. They were seeking Jesus. A good thing, right? No. They only wanted physical blessings from Him. Not His teaching, not His words of life. They were not interested in the food that endures to eternal life. They were reaching for the food that perishes.

And so do we. It's a daily thing for us. We reach for the television remote which lies in front of us, but not the Bible which is behind us. We reach for that second cup of coffee on Sunday morning, yet behind us lies the opportunity to gather with God's people in Sunday School and Bible Class. Young people will reach for a job on Sunday mornings, yet behind them lies a place in the pew and at the Communion Table. We reach for what we want in life, but not for what we really need. We reach, as Jesus says, for the food that perishes.

Jobs are not sinful. Neither is the television or a cup of coffee. But all these are temporal blessings. They do not help us spiritually. They will all perish when this life is ended. "*Labor,*" says Jesus, "*for the food that endures to eternal life.*" But here's the challenge with that. It's that food that is behind us. And so we do not reach for it.

The Jews in our text thought that they could. "*What must we do,*" they asked, "*to be doing the works of God?*" How do we reach behind us, in other words, to grab hold of God and eternal life?

That is the question which every religion in the world tries to answer. And all of them say that it can be done. Every religion out there lays out to the world the works of God that people need to do to gain eternal life. They all prescribe the manner in which we are able to reach behind us and acquire the food that endures to eternal life.

But they're all wrong. Jesus tells us why. It cannot be done. Our world lies in front of us, but the food that endures to eternal life lies behind us. And we cannot reach for it and acquire it. It would be as impossible as turning around in the driver's seat of your car and attempting to drive with your hands behind your back holding on to the steering wheel. You would crash and burn. So will all who are led by the teachings of any and every religion in the world.

Jesus alone is the truth. He sets forth a faith, not a religion. And here is how He puts it in our text: "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*" "What must we do?" asked the Jews. No, no, replies Jesus; it's not what you do, but what God does. It's the work of God, He says, that you believe; it's not your work. You cannot reach God, grasp Him, believe in Him, and acquire eternal life. You cannot reach behind you. But here is the Gospel... God, from behind you, reaches out for you. He grasps you. He gives you faith to believe in Him. And He gives you the food that endures to eternal life.

This is why we baptize. This is why we gather here around Word and Sacrament faithfully. It's through Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Communion...through the Gospel that God gives you here in His house that He reaches out and grasps you giving you the food that endures to eternal life.

God does this for you because of His love and mercy. He reaches for you because Jesus reached for the cross of Calvary. That cross was put before Jesus. It was hideous, brutal; to suffer the punishment every sinner deserves; the punishment you and I deserve. But Jesus' posture was one of grace. He reached for that cross, and now He reaches for you to give you the blessings of the cross; the blessings He purchased by His blood for every sinner.

And those blessings are yours. Not because you reach for them; because Jesus reaches out for you. We reach for the wrong things every day. But you have a gracious God. He reached out to you and brought you here to His house today. He wants you to hear His words. To hear His word of Law and repent; to hear His word of Gospel, and to believe that He forgives you, because He does, each and every one of you He forgives. This is His work, and He delights in it. There is nothing He loves more than forgiving sinners; sinners like you and me who have been locked into a wretched position; who have been laboring not for the food that endures to eternal life, but that perishes.

But now He who reaches out for you, places His hands on yours..His pierced hands, full of love for you...and He guides your hands to reach behind you. We cannot do it. But with His hands on ours, He teaches us to reach for the food that endures. To reach for His Holy Bible which are His words to you. To reach for our place in Bible Study, for our seat in the pew, and our place at His Communion Table. "What must we do to do the works of God?" No, no. This is not our work. It is God's work in us. His loving work whereby He gives us to eat that food that endures to eternal life. Amen.