

Sermon on 5. Moses 8, 1-3, Holy Communion Service on the Eve of Confirmation, 26.05.2007
'The Bread which gives Life'

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Text:

This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. ²Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. ³He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

1. Hungry?

Dear Congregation,

There is a bit of Jewish humour that goes like this: An old man goes to a diner every day for lunch. He always orders the soup du jour, toe soup of the day. One day the manager asks him how he liked his meal. The old man replies, "It was good, but you could give a little more bread. Two slices of bread is not enough." So the next day the manager tells the waitress to give him four slices of bread. "How was your meal, sir?" the manager asks. "It was good, but you could give a little more bread," comes the reply. So the next day the manager tells the waitress to give him eight slices of bread. "How was your meal today, sir?" the manager asks. "Good, but you could give a little more bread," comes the reply. So, the next day the manager tells the waitress to give him a whole loaf of bread, 16 slices with his soup. "How was your meal, sir?" the manager asks, when he comes to pay. "It was good, but you could give just a little more bread," comes the reply once again. - The manager is now obsessed with seeing this customer satisfied with his meal, so he goes to the bakery, and orders a six-foot-long loaf of bread. When the man comes in as usual the next day, the waitress and the manager cut the loaf in half, butter the entire length of each half, and lay it out along the counter, right next to his bowl of soup. The old man sits down, and devours both his bowl of soup, and both halves of the six-foot-long loaf of bread. The manager now thinks he will get the answer he is looking for, and when the old man comes up to pay for his meal, the manager asks in the usual way: "How was your meal TODAY, sir?" The old man replies: "It was good as usual, but I see you are back to serving only two slices of bread!"

I do not know, how much bread you could eat, but I am pretty sure that it would not have to be a six-foot loaf of bread. - But can you imagine, that there are really people like this old man who asks for more bread each time, he comes to this restaurant, who eat until their stomachs are full, but are still hungry?

How can that be? Because compared to other parts of the world, we do not have so much the problem that people starve because the lack of food. Although a rising percentage of people, most of all children, is hungry, because people are poor, and do not make enough money to survive on their own; which is a shame and needs to be addressed and solved.

2. Hungry for more.

But what I am talking about is not the hunger, which we have when we have an empty stomach. I am talking about a different hunger: For instance the hunger for love. Many people do not pay attention to each other. The most shocking example to me is that the average couple in Canada talks not more than 4 ½ minutes daily to each other. And do not get fooled, this is not some deep talking they do. That this creates problems in the long run, because you have only talked about, who walks the dog and whether the weather will nice or not, is

a given. People do not stay together; people do not understand who the person they live with feels. They have no clue what their kids do and what they are up to. And one of the most basic, but also most problematic circumstances in our society, that people do not spend time with each other.

And this relates to the other hunger, the rising hunger for community. People are lonely, people feel neglected, people have no one to talk to, people have to create their own little virtual; substitutes like face book to make up for that. And that I do not get: Why go online, when you could meet people in flesh and blood? – There is one thing which people do underestimate, I think: If you chat online, you'll never hear some one laugh or get angry about what you have said. People loose touch of how people react to their words. You loose the feel for what is appropriate and what is not. You can post anything on a web-site, but if you were face to face with someone you would never say it.

Brenda, one of the adult confirmands gave me a good hint and pointed out a song by a band called 'Lifeshouse' that is called "Hanging By A Moment". that describes my "hunger" that also Jesus talks about here:

Desperate for changing, starving for truth.
Closer where I started, chasing after you.
I'm falling even more in love with you,
letting go of all I've held onto.
I'm standing here until you make me move,
I'm hanging by a moment here with you.
Forgetting all that I'm lacking, completely incomplete.
I'll take your invitation, you take all of me...

There are many people hungry out there, and may be we ourselves are hungry, too: Hungry for love and hungry for community.

And there is a rather simple solution to this problem, which, of course is not my own idea. Jesus, as we just heard a few moments ago, was talking in the Gospel of John about the bread which comes from haven, the bread which gives life to the world. Jesus also said: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

How can we understand this? Bread is bread and Jesus is Jesus, right?

I guess our confirmands, trained to make out the spiritual sense of words from the bible would say: Well, Jesus is talking about faith. He is talking about the relationship with God, which can not be devoured or used up as bread. Faith is something very important, not that it meets our needs instantly, but faith can give us the strength to deal with the challenges of our life unlike any bread which may satisfy for a while, but we all know, after 2 hours we are hungry again. Faith is something you can draw from, even if you have nothing; something which gives you hope, even if you do not see the light at the end of the tunnel yet. That's what Jesus means.

3. Where does our faith come from?

I asked the confirmands some time ago this question: Where does our faith come from? They answered: God and the bible and my family.

Faith needs to come from somewhere. This might be understood by all of us, but this is crucial. Some people might think this faith falls from heaven. This is true in a sense. But faith also needs to be passed on, handed down from generation to generation. We have to expose kids and adults to the stories and the word of the bible. We have to tell the stories and sit down before dinner and pray. If we do not teach people what faith is, and if we do not take a more active role in sharing our faith, we can complain that churches are half-empty

and that it seems that religion is on the retreat everywhere and that there are no values in our society, but we deny that we have part in those developments. And the only way to address this problem is, to pass faith on!

4. What symbolizes your faith?

I asked the confirmands, what symbolizes your faith? If you were to choose an image for your faith, what would it be? – And they answered: A circle with the first letter of my last name and a cross right beside it; flowers and angels, who are dancing and singing; a sun shining down on every person, animals and plants. - It is important to have such a picture in our minds and know where our faith comes from and equally important how it looks like. Picture your faith; come up with a short explanation, an image that you'll be able to share it. The confirmands are very specific and clear in their thoughts. Are we as adults?

Another question was: What nurtures our faith?

Fasten your seat-belt for this: Learning new things about the bible – this comes from confirmands, who have just been through a whole year of intense learning, and the first thing they say is: Learning more! – Why in the world - generally speaking - don't we share the same enthusiasm and eagerness to learn? I often meet grown-ups who think the confirmation lessons will do for the rest of their lives. NOT! – For that reason I was totally impressed by the three adults who joined the adult confirmation class and wanted to know everything there is to know about the Lutheran faith. Believing in Christ is a life-long leaning curve. It's like driving a car: If you pass the test, you have a licence, but then you start actually learning how to drive you car.

But that is not all. The confirmands also said that loving and caring for people, enjoying life as long as they can is part of hat nurtures their faith. – Coming back to the hunger for love an community: Faith has a direction, faith is based on community. Faith needs people. If a 12/13/14 year old confirmand gets that, why isn't that common knowledge among believers?

5. How can you apply your faith to your daily life?

Last question I asked and which relates to what I just said was: How can you apply your faith to your daily life?

Here is a whole list of answers:

- Tell people about the faith, how great it is (to believe).
- Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- Go to church.
- Pray.
- Obeying the Ten Commandments.
- Reading the Bible.

There is only one thing I would like to add to those otherwise great answers Where does our faith come from, what symbolizes your faith and where do we find the nourishment for our faith?

I just want to point to this table, where we are together with other, can feel the company of others who have the same needs. We can enter into this relationship with God. I just point to bread and wine, which we receive here. I point to Jesus' invitation to come into his presence and to be nourished by the bread and wine he is, like he said in John: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'.

I hope you make use of this great opportunity to receive everything you need, to quench your thirst and satisfy your hunger. How did the song say: I'll take your invitation, you take all of me... Amen.

And the Peace of God which passes all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.