



**Food for Life Campaign  
Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance  
Sermon Competition 2010-2011  
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**THE BREAD OF LIFE (John 6)**

In the Gospel of Saint John, the sixth chapter Jesus says: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.” Jesus, the son of God, however, doesn’t claim to cure all our diseases, neither to keep us eternally young in this world. Only in the coming world, the kingdom of God, the creation will once again become perfect after the return of Christ. He promises us eternal life after his return. The response among the peoples of the world has been enormous. I have seen statistics that there are more than two billions of Christians in the world. There have never been as many Christians as nowadays, and the number of Christians increases mostly in Asia, Africa and Latin America. People accept the offering of Jesus, when he gives them the bread from heaven, which gives eternal life. Therefore they start believing in him.

Jesus continues: “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. (---) Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” Now we begin to understand that when Jesus speaks about the bread of life he speaks about the Holy Communion. In the bread and wine of the Eucharist Christ gives himself to us. In the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” If we believe in the words of Jesus, we must also believe that the Holy Communion really gives us the great gifts which Jesus promised us: forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. However, I don’t doubt that God, our beloved heavenly Father, could give us the same gifts without bread and wine. In fact, in the Holy Bible we can find many evidences that God gives the same gifts - forgiveness of sins, life and salvation – without the Eucharist. Therefore we can get astonished, when Jesus says: “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Then it suddenly seems that God doesn’t give us the gifts - forgiveness of sins, life and salvation – if we don’t participate in Holy Communion. Is the truth that God hasn’t decided himself whether it is possible to receive the gifts directly or through the Holy Communion? No! It is never a problem for God to share valuable gifts. The problem is ours. Do we want to open our hearts and accept the gifts, which God for a long time would like to give us?

When two men want to have better contact with each other, nothing is better than to share a meal: The meal helps them to open their hearts to each other. In the same way it works also between God and man. The Eucharist, the holy Meal, creates a communion, where we feel and understand that God want us to be his friends, and that he longs to share his gifts with us. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

When two men want to have better contact with each other, nothing is better than to share a meal, when one can eat together and speak about life. Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, because food is a central matter in our lives. Life isn’t possible, if we don’t get food. Food is

that central, that it is mentioned in the Lords prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." And we know that even if pious Christians pray the Lords prayer twice or three times a day, not everyone has food every day.

Already in Genesis we read: "Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine." (Gen 47:13). Already in Genesis men had to struggle with the same question as people in our time. The same question also appears earlier in the sixth chapter of the gospel of Saint John, the day before Jesus speaks about bread of life. "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Exactly the same question can be heard also in our time. "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

A report from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states that global hunger is declining, but that it still is unacceptably high. In 2007 13 % of the world population were undernourished. That is 13 % of the world population. In 1971 26 % of the world population were undernourished. The percentage of undernourished people is now just the half compared with forty years ago. The number of starving people is however the same, because at the same time world population has grown from 3.7 billion to 6.7 billion people. The statistics show that it is possible to reduce starvation. But how can we go on with this?

During a famine there can be a short-term question: How can we get money to buy food to starving people? But there are also long-term questions: How can we assure food resources, if climate will change? How can we stop climate change, to avoid a global food crisis? How can we stop land grabbing in Africa and Asia, which means that rich countries buy a lot of land in Africa or Asia to produce cane for ethanol production, which may in the future reduce the possibilities to produce food? A very important question is: Which economic system gives the best basis for good and secure food production, which in the same time is good for the environment?

I will not give any answers in this sermon, because there are people which can give better answers to these questions than I. However, I will read some verses from John six, and see if we have anything to learn about these questions. Verses six and seven are especially important if we shall think further about these questions: "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.'" In fact we can only find two sentences in the Bible, where Andrew utters anything. One of them is when Andrew saw the little boy and the bread and fish, which could be his contribution. Andrew is a pattern for all of us, because he saw the boy. Perhaps Andrew's brother Peter, who was the informal leader of the disciples, was too busy to see the small ordinary people. But Andrew did. And the same time Andrew was a realist. He didn't think that the contribution of the boy should solve the problem. Nor he thought that his discovery of the boy and the bread and the fish should solve the problem. But although he doubted in the boy and in himself, he wasn't too humble and modest to mention the possibility to Jesus. We shall thank God for people like Andrew. Not many people see them. They never become famous. But they have ideas, and when they very seldom utter anything, we have a good cause to listen to them.

"One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.'" We should also think about the boy. He had five barley loaves and two fish. It was his packed lunch and dinner, the only food he had for the whole day. If he was a hungry teenager he would have been able to eat five barley loaves and two fish without problem in one day. But this boy chose to show his packed lunch to Andrew. He knew what was sharing. Many others among the people had also brought packed lunches with them when they went to listen to Jesus. But there was a difference. This boy shared his lunch.

Many others didn't. Why? I think that had got a good education, in which he was told that one should be generous. His parents gave him that education, and perhaps his grandfather and grandmother or other people around him, or perhaps the rabbi in the synagogue. Giving a girl or a boy a good education is among the most important thing an adult can give to a child. Another important thing is the sharing of bread. When the bread is broken and shared something holy is going on. The sharing is holy, both in the Holy Communion and in the everyday communion between people. We shall thank God for people like the boy with the barely loaves and two fish, for the people that share what they got.

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.’ We have already spoken about Andrew and about the boy, but there are also more people who are not mentioned in the sentence, but we can discern their existence between the lines in the Bible. Who had caught the fish which the boy brought? Did he fish them himself, or did some fishermen catch them. Perhaps the father of the boy was a fisherman. We should thank God for all the people who are working with food production. In the time of Jesus fishing equipment was very simple, and it was uncertain whether one should get anything or net. When Jesus met Simon Peter he said: “‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.” That happened then. In our time it shouldn't be enough to put the nets into the deep water, because many of our seas are overfished. We are now fishing five times more than fifty years and three fifths of the fishing places are threatened by overfishing. In the beginning God created the fish in the sea and he gave them to us, that we should eat from them, but together with the gift he also gave a responsibility: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” I'm sure that we should also till and keep the sea.

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.’ Who had grown the barley in the five loaves of the boy? Who had baked the bread? The father probably worked in the farming, but when the father was fishing I'm sure that the mother had to do the hard work. Both sowing and harvest require a lot of work, but the most acute problem probably was irrigation. It was necessary to keep the irrigation channels in good condition to make the seed to grow. And water for the household the mother had to get in the well, which was located quite a distance from the house. But if the boy had a sister, she had to help about the water. The water and the yeast the mother “took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened” and she baked barley loaves and packed them together with the two fish as a lunch for her boy, when he should go to listen to the prophet Jesus of Nazareth, who had “went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.” Therefore the boy brought his packed lunch with the five barely loaves and the two fish.

The boy wanted to see the signs that Jesus did, but he couldn't imagine that the greatest sign to be in that day was in his own packed lunch, because when the packed lunch was opened and the barely loaves and the fish were shared, Jesus did one of the greatest signs: he opened the hearts of men.

And Jesus didn't just give us a sign. He also gave us a task: “When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’” This task was not an order just in that situation when Jesus gave food to five thousand men, women and

children. This is an eternal task for humanity: “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” Enormous amounts of food are thrown away every day just because many people buy too much food, cook too much food and also because people think that it is unhealthy to eat food which is a little old. If we only could learn not to buy too much, not to cook too much and not to be too anxious about the food from yesterday. When Jesus taught us: “Give us this day our daily bread” there were no refrigerators, but now there are in many places in the world. Therefore we can also pray to God: “Let us this day be thankful of the bread of yesterday.” Yes, we can pray like that, because Jesus said: ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’”

The boy wanted to listen to the words of Jesus and he also understood that what Jesus said was true: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” We shall never forget that God is the creator of heaven *and* earth. He is not only the creator of heaven, and not only the creator of earth. Therefore when Jesus wants to give us bread of life, it is a matter not only of our daily bread and not only of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, but a matter of everything. Bread of life is everything that makes our lives possible, bread for our bodies and salvation for our souls.

Let us do like the little boy. Let us listen to the words of Jesus. Let us accept his rich gifts. And let us work together with him in the same time as we accept his grace.

References:

Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. Anglicized Edition

Statistics about number of Christians:

[http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html)

Statistics about hunger: <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

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