

12th Sunday after Pentecost 2018.

John 6:35-51.

**Hymns: 347, 361, 19, 308, 289, 197.**

**Introit: Psalm 34:1-8.**

**P** Let me bless the LORD at all times!

**C** **His praise will continually be in my mouth.**

**P** My soul will boast about the LORD.

**C** **Humble people will hear it and rejoice.**

**P** Magnify the LORD with me,

**C** **and let us exalt His name together!**

**P** When I sought the LORD, He answered me,

**C** **and delivered me from all my fears.**

**P** People have looked to Him and have been radiant,

**C** **and their faces should never be ashamed.**

**P** This poor man called out. The LORD heard him,

**C** **and saved him out of all his troubles.**

**P** The angel of the LORD

**C** **encamps around those who fear Him and delivers them.**

**P** Taste and see that the LORD is good!

**All: Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!**

**Collect:** Gracious Father, Your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread that gives life to the world. Grant that Christ, the bread of life, may live in us and we in Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Old Testament: 1Kings 19:1-8.**

**Epistle: Ephesians 4:17-5:2.**

**Gospel: John 6:35-51.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, John 6: 35-51.

**35** Jesus told them, “I am the Bread of life. The person who comes to Me will certainly not be hungry and the person who believes in Me will certainly never be thirsty. **36** However, I have told you both that you have seen Me and that you do not believe. **37** Everything that the Father gives to Me will come to Me; and I shall certainly not cast out the person who comes to Me, **38** because I have come down from heaven, not that I may do My will, but the will of Him who has sent Me. **39** This is also the will of the One who has sent Me, that I should not lose anything of what He has given to Me, but that I should raise it on the last day. **40** For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and that I should raise him on the last day.”

**41** The Jews therefore grumbled because He said, “I am the Bread that has come down from heaven.” **42** They asked, “Is this not Jesus, Joseph’s son, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

**43** Jesus answered them, “Stop grumbling among yourselves! **44** A person can come to Me only if the Father, who has sent Me, draws him; and I shall raise him on the last day. **45** The prophets wrote: ‘God will teach everyone.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me. **46** Not that anyone has seen the Father. Only He who comes from God has seen the Father. **47** Truly, truly, I tell you, the one who believes in Me has eternal life.

**48** “I am the Bread of Life. **49** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. **50** This is the Bread coming down from heaven, so that anyone may eat from it and not die. **51** I am the living Bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever, and the Bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. **Amen.**

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

Free will is overrated and, if you think about it, it's what got us into the mess of sin in the first place. It was not the Father's will in creating man in the beginning that he would die - quite the opposite in fact. He created Adam and Eve in His image, out of His own free will, to live forever. Had they been content with His will, Adam and Eve would still be alive walking the earth with you and me to this day.

But they weren't. They had a better idea according to the free will with which they were created. And in exercising it, they stepped outside of God's will for them and created their own demise - and ours. And so, they're not still around because, as God said they eventually would, and against everything God wanted for them, they have surely died - just you and I will follow them in death because we too are bound and determined to exercise our free will according to our own sinful idea of how life should be lived and what makes us happy.

If Christ, the Bread of Life and Son of the Living God, who is perfect and without sin came "down from heaven, not to do [His] own will," how much less should we sinful men insist on asserting our own free will, much less expect that it would be a good thing if we did?

Ever since that first exercise of free will by the first man and woman created in God's image according to His perfect will took them down the path God meant to be not only less, but never travelled, even the most faithful of God's people have caused themselves undue suffering and even untimely death because of their stubborn insistence on having their own way and making things happen instead of trusting God's way and waiting on Him to make it happen at the proper time.

We saw it last week not only in the grumbling chosen people of God called Israel, but in God's chosen and humanly revered leaders of Israel, Moses and Aaron who themselves exercised their free will - Aaron to escape from the bodily harm he feared at the hands of the Israelites, and Moses to scold and frighten the Israelites in submission to his rule.

Now this week in our OT reading we learn that another holy man and prophet of God, Elijah, who with Moses appeared to stand and talk with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Elijah, even had a moment of doubt about God's will for him and so out of fear for his life resorted to his own means to save his own hide. That is, he exercised his own free will and ran away from what God had set before Him.

When Jezebel sent a messenger to tell Elijah she had sworn to kill him for **everything that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword**, - he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. **But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, he said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."**

Dear friends in Christ, I can say with almost certainty that every minister of our Lord whom He has called and sent out to serve His people, has at one time or another run off when times got tough and the people weren't liking the Word of God they were hearing, to sit under the broom tree and pray with Elijah, **"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life."** And if I were a betting man - which aside from the occasional calculated risk in things like State of Origin, Melbourne Cup Day, Lotto and filling out a ballot on election day - I am not. I'd have to put my money down on the likelihood that pretty much every one of you have had at least one such moment in your life as well when you have had enough of God's Word and the grief it seemed to be causing in your life. I know I have.

Being the patient Father He is, God waits - as in the parable of the Prodigal Son - until we have had enough of our own will and the slop it wallows in; or, as with Elijah, when we come to the point of breaking down because we just can't take it anymore, He provides the bread and water of life to strengthen us for and sustain us through the battles with the unbelieving world and the weakness of our own flesh that are sure to come along with the prodding of the evil one.

As we learn from Scripture, and confess together as Lutherans with St. Paul the apostle of our Lord, our free will is nothing of which to boast let alone to trust and follow as if doing it our way is what faith is all about. The free will of man, even that of baptized, believing Christians, “strives against God's Law, even after [being born again from above in faith] Therefore, it is clear (a) the free will, from its own natural powers, cannot work or agree to work anything for its own conversion, righteousness, and salvation, nor follow, believe, or agree with the Holy Spirit, who through the Gospel offers a person grace and salvation; and (b) from inborn, wicked, rebellious nature it resists God and His will with hostility, unless it is enlightened and controlled by God's Spirit.” [FoC SD Art. II]

So to revisit the original question from a little different angle, if Christ, the Bread of Life and Son of the Living God, who is perfect and without sin came “**down from heaven, not to do [His] own will,**” and even the will of believers and such faithful men of God as Aaron, Moses, the prophet Elijah, and the apostle Paul “**strives against God's Law,**” what gain is there to be found or what difference is there between us and the unbelievers Paul talks about in our epistle lesson as Gentiles if free will, that is our freedom of choice, is the essence of our faith.

Faith is not a matter of choosing God, but of believing God when the Son He sent to die for you says, “**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.**” [John 15:16]

As we learned from Paul today, the walk of the Gentiles “**Their minds are set on meaningless things.**” that is according to their own thinking guided by their own free will, “**However, that is not what you learned when you came to know Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to strip off your old self, which follows your former ways of living, and ruins you as it follows the desires that deceive you. 23 Instead, you were taught to be continually renewed in the spirit of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, which is created to be like God, truly righteous and holy.**” [Ephesians 4:17b, 20-24]

That true righteousness and holiness is none other than the righteousness and holiness of Christ, Who said, “**I have come down from heaven?**”  
**43 Jesus answered them, “Stop grumbling among yourselves! 44 A person can come to Me only if the Father, who has sent Me, draws him; and I shall raise him on the last day. 45 The prophets wrote: ‘God will teach everyone.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father. Only He who comes from God has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I tell you, the one who believes in Me has eternal life.**

Now I ask you what could be better than that? If Jesus came down from heaven not do His own will but to do His Father's, to die for us so that we could be raised with Him on the Last Day, why would we not join Jesus in praying, “**Father, not my will but yours be done?**” What could be better for us and for our neighbours than submit to His will? For the Father's will is always and only that we who have been given to Christ in Baptism will be kept as members of His Holy Bride the Church - wherein His will is done on earth among our neighbours even as it is in heaven among all the saints so that we should have the forgiveness of sins that is the Bread of Life now and forever - in the name of the Father, and of the t Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**  
**3rd Hymn: 19,**

## Prayer of the Church 12th Sunday after Pentecost

P The eyes of all look to You, O Lord: You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing. Incline now Your ear to hear our prayers.

*Brief Silence.*

P For the pure proclamation of the Gospel throughout all the world, that false teaching and Satan's lies be thwarted, in order that many be drawn to the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ,

Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For our Parish, and all congregations in the AELC, that they flourish and thrive, be strong witnesses to their confession of faith, show mercy on account of God, and live together in unity of doctrine and love for the neighbour, Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For our pastors, to keep them from conflict, burnout, or depression, and that our Lord give them strength and courage through the example of Elijah and all who have gone before them, and bring them comfort through the forgiveness of sins and the promise of everlasting life,

Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For doctors, nurses, hospice care workers, and all who work to restore our health or care for us before death, and for those who protect us the police, state emergency workers, fire fighters and our army personal and their families, that they may be given wisdom, skill, and compassion for their tasks,

Lord in your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For the sick [*including* \_\_\_\_\_] that they never doubt that God hears their prayers, and for all who suffer from any kind of hardship, that the Lord relieve their pain and provide all that they need, \_\_\_\_\_ Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For those who mourn, that they be comforted by Jesus' words that He is the bread of life, and that "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever," \_\_\_\_\_ Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For our families on earth, that they reflect Your Fatherly care. Bless all whom You have joined as husband and wife, that our marriages become a constant reflection of Your love for Your Church. Fill parents with the desire and the wisdom to raise their children in the Holy Christian Church, and fill children with honour and respect for the parents You have given to them. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P For all who receive Christ's body and blood this day, that reconciled to each other, they rejoice in receiving the Lord's forgiveness through this precious gift; that it strengthen them in times of doubt, and nourish them in body and soul, \_\_\_\_\_ Lord in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Risen, ascended and glorified Lord, You have promised that as the true and living bread, those who believe in You will never hunger nor thirst. By Your Holy Spirit, keep us steadfast in faith, give us grace to live out our baptismal lives in repentance and forgiveness, and keep our eyes ever focused on the life that never ends, knowing that You will raise us up on the last day; for You, Lord Jesus, live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C Amen.**

**4th Hymn: 308,**