

"God Is neither Mocked nor Manipulated"

Text: John 6:24-35

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Dear Fellow Servant-Slaves of the One True God:

It is naïve to imagine that, unlike the rest of the citizens in this country, we Christians are immune to manipulation. By God's grace Christians may be resistant to certain forms of manipulation, but certainly not all. The world is full of people who exercise this sort of control for a living, and they are, for the most part, very good at what they do – so good, in fact, that they most often leave no trace of their work or passing.

Ever ask yourself why you do what you do, buy what you buy, even like what you like? We'd like to imagine that it's all just a matter of personal taste – free decisions made by free people in a free society. Only it's not that simple. Not even close. Human beings share a universal need to be loved, appreciated, admired and respected. We will unconsciously therefore do whatever we can to gain what we crave and to avoid the opposite – which in this case is to be hated, despised, and ridiculed. Clothes are the most obvious example. Women will wear shoes worthy of a medieval torture chamber because some unseen force has declared them to be "in style." Men will throw out or give away perfectly good ties, suits, and shirts for the same reason.

The manipulation goes much deeper than we'd care to admit, and it's all explained by something as simple as Pavlov's dog. You remember Pavlov's dog. Every time he fed his dog he rang a bell and the dog would begin to salivate. Before long the dog was so conditioned that he salivated every time the bell was rung, whether he was fed or not. We're not all that much different. Whenever we get the things we crave (love, admiration, appreciation or respect) we mentally catalog how we gained that need and, consciously or not, we repeat the process. Ever get a compliment on what you were wearing from someone you admire? Odds are whatever you were wearing instantly became your favorite outfit. Advertisers simply create the image of the things we crave and associate them with their product. The message is received loud and clear: *Buy our product and you will fulfill your deepest needs.*

While we don't like to see ourselves as that weak and malleable, the evidence is overwhelming that we often think and act the way others want us to. It also comes as no surprise that the stronger and more confident the individual, the less susceptible he or she is to this sort of influence. But that doesn't mean that others won't continue to try to manipulate them – which explains why man even tries to manipulate his God.

Our text for this morning gives an example of that very thing, along with several other divine truths that we can't afford to ignore. The text that will form the basis of our study this morning is found in the Sixth Chapter of John's Gospel:

^{ESV} **John 6:24-35 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ ¶ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵ ¶ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**

So far the very words of our God. Confident that God will keep his promise not only to visit us with power whenever we study his Word, but also that he will keep his promise to grant to us, his children, those good things for which we ask, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

First the time and setting of our text. Picture Jesus' three-year ministry as a rollercoaster of popularity. He rose in meteoric fashion, and then fell just as quickly. Both his rise and his fall were based on flawed concepts of who he was and what he had come to do. His popularity was approaching its high point at the time of our text, but these very words that he spoke in our text marked the beginning of his decline in the people's eyes. Unfortunately this needed to happen. As Jesus made known in our text, he recognized that his popularity was artificial in that the people were profoundly misguided. They loved him for all the wrong reasons. From our text: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."** He is referring, of course, to the fact that he had just fed thousands in the wilderness with just a few loaves and a few fish. Satan, by the way, would have been fine with this sort of "savior" – one that would essentially keep the godless fat and happy in their unbelief. Jesus wanted more. That's why he came to earth – to do infinitely more for mankind. He came not to fill their bellies but to save their eternal souls.

In response to Jesus' words in our text, the Jews tried their rather pathetic manipulation – *on the Son of God*. Did you catch it in our text? First they ask Jesus, **"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"** Jesus' reply was pure gospel: **"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."** Don't miss the singular in response to the plural here. The Jews were operating on a "stomach level." Jesus was trying to take them to a "soul level," but they weren't getting it. As soon as Jesus told them that there was a better "bread" than the kind they were looking for, their natural question was to ask what they would have to *do* to get that bread. So in their question they used the plural - **"What must we do, to be doing the works (plural) of God?"** That's man's natural question and inclination, isn't it? *What all do I have to do to get what you are offering?* Only that's not how the gospel works. Note the singular in Jesus' reply: **"This is the work (singular) of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."** If these words were written in today's English, the word "work" would have quotation marks around it, because "believing" is not a work that we perform; it is a gift or ability given to us by God the Holy Spirit. What Jesus is telling them is this: *"You don't have to do anything, just trust that I am doing everything necessary for you, as your substitute, and it will be yours."* That, again, is just pure, sweet gospel. God, not man, pays the bill for sin.

The Jews didn't get it, so here comes the silly attempt at manipulation: **So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and**

believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" As manipulations go, this was pretty thin, wasn't it? Jesus obviously saw right through it. He knew they were still looking for the kind of bread that would fill their stomachs. What they were saying was *"Okay, so give us what we really want (free food) and then we will believe you."* Jesus responds by pulling them under again to that deeper level where they needed to exist. He knew that to exist where they needed to be spiritually, they needed first to release their hold on how they *thought* things worked: **"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."**

So here's what's going on in our text: The Jews come to Jesus and tell him that they want food. Jesus tells them that what he is offering is food for the soul – not an easier life on earth but eternal life in heaven. The Jews ask what they have to do to earn *that* food. Jesus tells them that they don't have to do anything to earn it; they should instead believe that he is earning it for them. The Jews, still focusing on the other kind of food, tell Jesus that if he will prove that he is what and who he claims to be by providing food for their bodies, then they will gladly believe in him.

Understand also that what they are really thereby telling Jesus is that the bread for their bodies comes first, and that only if they get what they want will they consider this other "bread." In fact we know from the verses that follow our text that when Jesus refused to give them what they wanted, nearly all turned away from him.

As always, we waste these precious words of truth and do a great disservice to our God whenever we fail to learn from them; whenever we fail to individually and personally apply them to our own lives. So what does all of this have to do with you and me today?

The fact is Christians of all generations – including you and me – are often just as guilty as they when it comes to trying to manipulate our God. Scripture tells us that **"God cannot be mocked."** We mock him whenever we imagine that sin and unbelief have no consequences. It is also just as true that God cannot be manipulated. How do we attempt to do that? Just as the Jews did in our text. We try to hold God to "if/then" scenarios. We saw this sort of thing in Jacob, didn't we? As he fled in fear from his brother Esau he tried to make this deal with his God: **"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall**

be my God, ²² **and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.**" (Genesis 28:20-22)

That's how man naturally believes that God operates – as though he can be persuaded to give us what we want if we promise to do what he wants. That's not the way it works. In fact what makes Jacob's plan so silly is that God had just finished promising him the very things that he thought he needed to bargain for: **"I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.** ¹⁴ **Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.** ¹⁵ **Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."** (Genesis 28:13-15)

Whether we care to admit it or not, you and I tend to do exactly the same thing today. We give lip service to the idea that God will be our God through thick and thin, but what we really mean is that all will be well as long as "thin" never comes. It gets even worse in that we hold God to his word even when we fail to keep ours. God called us for a purpose. He brought us to faith so that we might serve him by bringing the law and gospel to others. 1 Peter 2:9: **"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."** Yet even when we fail to do what God called us to do, we imagine that God must do whatever we demand of him – if he wants us, at some point in the future, to do what he wants us to do.

God cannot be manipulated. He doesn't operate according to man's if/then mentality. The good news here is that there is no need to try to manipulate him. He's already promised to provide us all that we need, and he always keeps his promises. Matthew 6:31-33: **"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"** ³² **For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.** ³³ **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**

This is, in the end, just another example of the unique character of the gospel – by which we are saved. God's love and mercy are always *undeserved*. He does not do what he does because we are in any way deserving, or because we have in any way earned it. He does not forgive

our sins and open heaven's door to us *if* we do what we are supposed to do. He's already done it; he's already declared our sin-debt to have been paid in full by his Son. Believing, that perfection is already our own personal possession. In fact God has always done what he has done despite our sin and unworthiness. He sent his Son to a universally unworthy world, and he continues, day-by-day, to shower an unappreciative people with his blessings.

God help us to recognize and appreciate the fact that he does not operate the way we do. We do not need to leverage or earn his love and forgiveness. Both are already ours. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Exodus 16:2-6, 12-15** And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ⁴ ¶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not." ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel... "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him--what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." ¹³ ¶ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift... ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

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The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 2, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 459 (Red Hymnal)

"Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 16:2-6, 12-15) Nothing seems to get man's attention faster than his stomach. Not much else seems to matter when you are hungry. That is, however, in no way a valid excuse or reason to doubt God or complain about his provision. In our first lesson we hear how the Jews did just that, and how God provided for them. This morning's sermon will carry this thought forward.

The New Testament Lesson: (Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16) Our second reading, in a way, completes the first. While our natural inclination is to find satisfaction for our temporal, earthly needs, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul here points us to the far nobler pursuit of kingdom work – which includes anything that **"builds up the body of Christ."** The **"body of Christ"** is of course his Church. Anything and everything that strengthens and expands God's Church should be seen as our most important goal in life. God grant us this nobler hunger for the Bread of Life and for the sharing of the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 532 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Way Not Mine O Lord"

The Sermon - Text: John 6:24-35 (Printed on the back page)

"God Is neither Mocked nor Manipulated"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 477 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Thou the Church's Head"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 45 (Verses 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Now the Hour of Worship O'er"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates scattered around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (48) Average (51)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Teacher Desirae Naumann is scheduled to be installed this morning as the first teacher of the newly opened school of St John's Lutheran in Clarkston, WA. Pastor-elect Michael Schierenbeck is also scheduled to be installed as pastor of Faith of Markesan, WI this morning, along with teachers Sherman Carstensen, Barry Hay, and Marie Muehlenhaupt. Becky McKenney has returned the one-year call to teach at Trinity of Watertown.

VBS – Our summer Vacation Bible School requires a great deal of planning and effort. Thanks therefore to those who selflessly gave of their time to make this year's VBS possible. Sessions were held this past week and 10 children were in attendance.

Church Picnic – The annual Church Picnic is scheduled for Sunday, August 30. A shelter at Hillside Park has been reserved. If you plan to attend the picnic, please take a look at the food sign-up sheet on the mailbox table and add your name as appropriate.

Church Cleaning – Also on the mailbox table you will find a church cleaning list. Several projects are still looking for volunteers. Most of the items are fairly quick and easy and can be completed during the week, as individual schedules allow.