A few years ago, a friend and I went backpacking in a Mountain range in Wyoming called the Wind River Range. We hiked 60 miles in four days because we only had a week before we had to get back for summer work. We carried all our food with us, so we packed minimally to make our burdens lighter. We ended up packing, pretty much exclusively, food that would just need to be rehydrated with boiling water. After days of sore legs and sore shoulders, we were finally on our way out. It was a rough day; we had 16 miles to hike, we had failed our goal of summiting a mountain because of some weather-related problems, and we were both sick of oatmeal and soup.

We were dragging through the last day of hiking until we met a man who was just beginning his hike. We were angry and not talking to each other until, all of a sudden, we hear whistling, and a shirtless man with a giant beard came walking around the corner. We stopped to chitchat, have a snack, and tell him about the trail. He told us he had just come from town and recommended a restaurant with a ¾pound, thick-cut bacon, cheeseburger. As we said our goodbyes, we had a new goal. The promise of a thick, juicy burger after days of runny oatmeal and soup was enough to push us through the last eight or so miles of up and down hiking.

The people in our reading for today were a lot like my friend and I; they had been fed a steady diet of watery oatmeal from the Pharisees and religious leaders. They were given a watered down understanding of the Scriptures which turned them into a book of requirements. The Pharisees didn’t perform miracles like the prophets of old. Jesus and His disciples were like the prophets of old, and the promise of something more substantial pushed them to chase Jesus and His disciples into the wilderness.

Jesus can see that the people are lost, sheep without a shepherd, and He has compassion on them. He sees how hungry they are, and He feeds them, first with His Word as He opens the Scriptures to them. He shows them not only what God requires of them, but He shows them the promise of the coming Kingdom of God. He shows them God’s promise of a coming Savior. The people are so enthralled by what He is saying that they stay with Him all day, without care for what they will eat.

Then, Jesus feeds them again; not *with* His Word, but by the *power* of His Word He multiplies bread and fish, and more than 5,000 people were fed. With a blessing, He multiplies the food and feeds them all.

Our lives are up and down hikes. We go through times when things are easy and going well. When we are healthy, our jobs are enjoyable and our family agreeable. Then, there are times when life isn’t going so well; our jobs become a burden, our families become a source of contention, we get sick, bad things happen. Life is full of ups and downs. It doesn’t matter if you are a Christian or not; bad things are going to happen. The great weariness that comes with life is common to all people. So too is the resulting hunger. Everyone is looking for something to fill them, something to give their life meaning, something to make hard times in their life easier and the easy times longer. We all want to live longer and to be happier.

The devil knows this, and he seeks to help people with this problem. He wants you to look inside yourself for the answers. He wants you to gorge yourself on the quick and easy things in this life: sex, porn, food, alcohol, drugs, video games, TV shows, sports, movies, self-help books, & even exercise. Anything to fill the gap, anything to make us feel better for a little while. Anything to distract us from the hunger that we feel.

Don’t get me wrong, not all of those things are inherently bad. Sex, food, entertainment, exercise, and the like are all good gifts that God has given us. But they are only good when used in the way that God has directed us to use them. When used inappropriately, dear Christians, these things won’t fill you, they won’t make your life easier, they are just distractions, they fill you up for a moment only to leave you hungrier.

Filling yourself up on candy will only leave you worse off in the long run. Dear Christians, the devil offers you easy fixes to your hunger that will fail you. Christ offers you so much more. He offers you good and solid food. Food that will sustain you. He offers you a cheeseburger at the end of a long hike.

He offers you His word. His word when it is read, when it is taught, and when it is spoken from the mouth of a Christian has the power to give you more than just a momentary fix. It fills you up and empowers you to live your life. If you fill yourself up on His Word, it won’t make all the hard times go away, but I promise you that the Word of God will sustain you through whatever struggles you are facing.

The promise of something better pushed my friend and I through the last part of our hike. There are many Christians who treat their life the same way; they live life as if they are just waiting to die and go to heaven. But dearly beloved, Christ offers you heaven today; He offers you a foretaste of the feast to come, He offers you real food, His body and blood, in simple bread and wine. Don’t live your life waiting to die; live your life constantly looking for heaven. Don’t wait for Jesus to return; run and seek Him where He is, like the people in our reading did. Run to the altar of Christ and receive heaven itself. Receive the forgiveness of your sins, receive the bread of life, receive here, at His table, eternal life and salvation.

Don’t fall for the tricks of this world. Don’t run after money, power, wealth, or happiness. Run to Christ, run to where He will be found–in the Divine Service. Don’t wait until you are starving to be fed, don’t wait for the difficult parts of life to come to Him. Come to Him always. Immerse yourself in Him and in His Word. Read your Bible, come to Bible class, read Lutheran books, read our confessions, find a Lutheran podcast to listen to. Don’t settle for anything less than the whole truth, anything less than the biggest and juiciest cheeseburger.

Dear Christians, we are not just waiting to die and go to heaven. God has given us good and meaningful work to do here on earth. In your vocations, whatever they may be, God has given you holy work to do. Whether that is holding your child or grandchild, caring for a loved one, fixing a car, teaching a child, fixing a cavity, writing software, editing an excel sheet, living next to someone, or anything else, God has given you holy work to do. Holy, but difficult work. He has included you in His mission to seek and save the lost.

There are many people in your neighborhood, in Watertown, in Wisconsin, in America, and in the world, who are starving for solid food–sheep without a shepherd. There are many people who have broken themselves or have been broken by the quick fixes of the devil. They need you to lead them to where Jesus is. It is difficult work I know, but you are not alone. God Himself is with you. It is He who will feed you and sustain you, and finally, it is He who will save those people, just as it is He and He alone who has saved you.