

“The Bread of Life”
John 6: 24-35
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Rev. Dr. Don Dempsey
Presbyterian Church of Palatine
Palatine, IL

Last week our scripture lesson was from the gospel of Matthew the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Today we just read from the gospel of John where we pick up the story the day after Jesus performed this miraculous event.

Just prior to today’s scripture we read in verses 14 – 15:

When the people saw the sign that he had done they began to say: “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

When Jesus realized they were about to come and make him king, he withdrew to the mountain by himself. (John 6: 14-15)

But the crowds of people, who shared the meal with him the day before, those same people who tried to turn him into their king, were not about to let him be by himself.

We can understand their feelings. After all, Jesus in their minds has the potential to do something unheard of, to lighten the fundamental burdens of life that plague their existence.

He just fed more than 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, who knows what else he can do!

If he can provide food, then he just might be able to do the same with shelter and clothing; he might be able to protect them from the never-ending uncertainties of their lives.

Who among us would not choose that sort of security? After all, in our time so much of our living is dedicated to the illusion that somehow our complete safety can be ensured and that we can be protected against all the illnesses and evils common to human existence.

Wouldn’t it be great to be able to continually find ways to bail ourselves out from our sins of pride and greed?

This delusional pursuit has become an obsession.

The pursuing crowd catches up with Jesus on the other side of the lake in Capernaum. There they greet him with a question:

“Rabbi, when did you get here?” (John 6: 25)

It sounds like an innocent enough question, but it has a deeper meaning.

They know something about him, but they want and need to know more. Their question is not limited to time and place; it is a question about ultimate origins. They want to know where he came from and how he came to be.

These people have been looking for him for hours and have crossed the lake to find him, but Jesus detects an ulterior motive and candidly calls their bluff.

“You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs—and for free.” (John 6: 26 – The Message)

Jesus is upset because they don't understand; they don't get it; they missed the point completely.

“Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last.” (John 6:27 – The Message)

Jesus makes the point by saying that the only food that can feed your starving spirits and fill your empty insides is the “food that endures for eternal life” (John 6:27 NIV).

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35 – NIV).

It's both easy and hard to understand. We too often miss the point.

The crowd who followed Jesus to the other side of the lake has trouble understanding what Jesus has to offer, how different that is from ordinary bread and water.

Pre-feminist folklore preached that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Jesus took this wisdom one step further. The metaphor of Jesus, as the Bread of Life, is a metaphor that meets us hungering humans where we think we are empty –

In our stomachs

But then points us to where our real emptiness lies –

In our souls.

Jesus' image goes through our stomachs to get to our souls.

Twelfth century mystic Meister Eckhardt warned that:

"Some people want to see God with their eyes as they see a cow, and to love him as they love their cow. They love their cow for the milk and cheese and the profit it makes them. This is how it is with people who love God for the sake of outward wealth and inward comfort. They do not rightly love (God) they do so for their own advantage."

Aren't we also guilty of using God the way a drunk uses a lamp post not for the light – but to lean against?

God is not some Cosmic Crutch propping us up, making our life easier, and lending us a hand when we need it.

Neither is God a divine "Mr. Fix-it," waiting around until we need someone to gets us out of a crisis that we more than likely created for ourself.

Those who see God as a "Mr. Fix-it" god often have a prayer-life that resembles that kind of attitude:

"Dear God, help me, I need to hit all the green lights in order to get to my important meeting on time..."

"Dear God, help the Cubs or the White Sox (depending on your allegiance); Please help my team make it to the play-offs, they need your intervention..." (Now that would be a miracle)

"Dear God, I have just bounced another check and my wife is going to hit the roof when she finds out, please help..."

For these and other emergencies we pray to a "Mr. Fix-It" god hoping that he will swoop down and change those lights, see that my team makes it to the play-offs, and takes care of that bank statement."

When we think like the crowd in our scripture lesson, the crowd who were pursuing Jesus for the wrong reasons, Jesus will have none of it. He despises such crass opportunism. And he tells them:

"The bread you are after will not last. Yesterday it alleviated your hunger. You ate the bread and now you are hungry again."

"There is food that perishes and there is food that lasts. God the Father has marked me to provide you the food that endures. So work for that food."

They ask:

"How do we do that? How do we perform the works of God?"

The answer is disarmingly simple:

"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

So they asked him:

"What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?"

What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'

Jesus said to them,

"I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven; for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said:

"Sir, from now on, give us that bread."

Jesus then declared:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus offers us a different type of nourishment. He offers us **"the bread of life"** — in other words, himself.

In Jesus we have everything we need for life. Jesus provides God's grace, God's help, God's guidance and God's assistance. He provides us life forever with God.

What do our lives look like when they're sustained by the bread of life?

When our lives are fed by Jesus' living bread, we are **transformed** and we begin to look like those described by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians 4: 25:

"What this adds up to, then, is this: No more lies, no more pretenses. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself. (Ephesians 4: 25 – The Message)

“Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, and profane talk. Be gentle with one another, be sensitive; forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgives you.” (Ephesians 4: 32 – The Message)

At the burning bush Moses asks God (Exodus 3:13-14):

"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

God said to Moses, "I Am who I AM ..." Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."

Yahweh is the God whose name means "I AM"

Yahweh, the "I Am" who speaks the word "may that spirit be you!"

Our true self is derived from the One Self, as disclosed in Exodus 3:14:

"I AM who I AM."

Jesus says:

"I AM the gate" that YOU MAY BE gates through which the hurting and hungry find pasture. (John 10:9)

Jesus says:

"I AM the good shepherd" that YOU MAY BE caretakers and compassion-givers to those who have gone astray. (John 10:11)

Jesus says:

"I AM the resurrection and the life" that YOU MAY BE brought back to life and alive with energy. (John 11:25)

Jesus says:

"I AM the true vine" that YOU MAY BE "filled with new wine,"
(John 15:1)

Jesus says:

"I AM the Son of God" that YOU MAY BE sons and daughters
of the living God. (John 10:36)

Jesus says:

"I AM the bread of life" that YOU MAY BE a Bethlehem (literally
"House of Bread") that births a Savior for a hungry and thirsty
world. (John 6:35)

As we prepare to receive the sacrament of communion together this
morning, may the bread and cup we share nourish our souls and
transform our very lives.

For Jesus says:

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be
hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John
6:35, NIV).

God says:

"I AM WHO I AM" that you may say,

"By the grace of God, I am what I am." (I Corinthians 15:10)

Amen!