

“The Bread of Life”
John 6: 24-35
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It is the day after Jesus fed the 5,000. The picnic is over and Jesus has taken his disciples to the other side of the lake. But the crowds of people who shared the meal with him yesterday and who then tried to turn him into their king are not about to let him go.

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

Who knows what he else can do! If he can provide food, then he just might be able to do the same with shelter and clothing; he can 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 ills and evils common to human existence. This delusional pursuit has become an obsession.

The pursuing crowd catches up with Jesus and his entourage on the other side of the lake in Capernaum. There they greet him with a question: “Rabbi, when did you get here?” It sounds like an innocent enough question, but it means much more.

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

Judging by what happens next, we might conclude that Jesus would not make it in a “user friendly” church. Although the people have been looking for him for hours and have crossed the lake to find him, 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)

You don't understand; you miss 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)

The only food that can feed your starving spirits and fill our empty insides is the “food that endures for eternal life" (John 6:27 NIV).

For "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. The Samaritan woman at the well, who is tired of drawing water every day (John 4:15), almost didn't get it.

The crowds who follow Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Tiberius in order to receive more free food have trouble understanding how different the sustaining elements Jesus offered them, how different they were from ordinary bread and water.

Pre-feminist folklore preached that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Jesus appropriated this wisdom for men and women and took it one step further. The metaphor of Jesus, the Bread of Life, is a metaphor that meets 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 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) 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, lending us a hand when we need it.

Neither is God a divine "Mr. Fix-it," waiting around idly until we need someone to extricate us from some crisis that more than likely we ourselves created.

Those who see God as such a "Fix-it" god often have a prayer-life that resembles calling 9-1-1:

"Need to hit all green lights in order to get to your meeting on time? ...

Is your team losing in the bottom of the ninth? ...

Will your spouse hit the roof if she/he finds out you've bounced another check?

For these and other emergencies pray 9-1-1 and the magic Mr. Fix-It god will swoop down and change those lights, see that a walk off home run is hit, and hide that bank statement."

When we think like that we are like the crowds in our scripture that followed Jesus for the wrong reasons.

Jesus will have none of it. He despises such crass opportunism.

"The bread you are after," he tells them, "will not last. Yesterday you assuaged 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."

"How do we do that?" They ask. "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."

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

Then Jesus 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." (John 6: 29-32 NIV)

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, guidance and 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, they we are transformed and we begin to look like those described by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians 4 beginning at verse 25:

"What this adds up to, then, is this:

No more lies, no more pretense. 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, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4: 32 – The Message)

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

Be gentle with one another, be sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgives you."

And remember **Jesus said:**

"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).

Amen!