

In the last two weeks, we heard from the Gospel of Mark and John about Jesus feeding the five thousand. We continue with John's story, in which Jesus makes a dramatic claim. **I AM the Bread of Life.**

John 6:24-35

24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for 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, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal Life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform 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, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which 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 will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

The Word of God

### **The Word of Life**

This story is difficult for me because it points to me and says, "You are so fortunate that you don't have to worry about where your next meal comes from. You have the luxury of grasping and looking for the spiritual truth in this passage." I want to shout, "That's not fair!" And it is not. It is not fair. But then I remember that Jesus commands us to create a world where all have enough to eat and can focus on spiritual truths. We must feed those who hunger with real bread. But there is more to our faith than social justice and charity. It contains deep spirituality that allows us to make social justice and charity part of our faith.

Bread was essential, for it comprised the mainstay of Jesus' followers. But Jesus also speaks of our deep spiritual need for the Bread of Life.

Previously, Jesus had been with a crowd along the western shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, and the crowd followed him. They had seen the miracle of the loaves and fishes feeding the five thousand.

A crowd that had seen the feeding of 5,000 wanted to make Jesus king. This caused Jesus to flee. Today's story begins as the crowd was still looking for Jesus and Jesus sent the disciples away while he went off by himself. Jesus needed to pray and regroup. He sent the disciples to the other side of the sea, and they suddenly encountered heavy winds. Then they saw Jesus walking across the water. They were terrified, not of the storm because they were fishers, but because they saw Jesus walking across the water. And then suddenly, they were all on the other side and the crowd rushed to catch up with them.

The crowd finds Jesus, and their first questions are like, "How'd you get here?" and "When did you get here?"

Jesus replies testily; "You're looking for me, not because you saw the power of God at work in me, but because you had your fill of bread." We can't be hard on the crowd because daily bread was an issue for the poor of the land, which was most of the people who followed Jesus. Give us this day our daily bread was an essential part of Life, a living reality. Knowing where their next meal was coming from was a blessing, like many people today.

Nothing that comes after this should lessen the power of Jesus' words to his disciples, and you and me. "You give them something to eat. That is our calling." But as Jesus says, "We don't live by bread alone."

Jesus wants us to know there is more than just bread involved in his actions. In John, when Jesus performs a miracle, it points beyond the miracle to a profound spiritual truth about Jesus.

Freshly baked bread is vital. Indeed, it stands for an essential part of our life, but Jesus said, "I have something else that is vital as well, the bread of life, and I have come to give that bread to you."

Then, the crowd did not understand what he said. Thinking of him as a prophet, they asked what they must do to do the works of God. "How can we have this power, too?" Remember, they wanted to make Jesus king. Power was important to poor, occupied people, and the hope for a powerful Messiah to free them from such conditions was part of their reality.

But Jesus' mission is about something different. He is not talking about political power but spiritual power, soul power. He tells them that if you want to do the works of God, trust me, and listen to me. "Believe in me" he says. Trust, faith, and allegiance are what it means to believe in Jesus. They are central themes in John's gospel.

But the crowd is not satisfied they want more.

"Show us a sign that we should trust you," they reply. It seems like they have forgotten the healings and the feeding. "More, more, more," they cry. "Show us more!"

"Be like Moses, who gave us manna in the wilderness. What are you going to do?" Jesus retorts, "That wasn't Moses; it was my Father, who provided the manna, and he also has bread for you."

The manna God gave them was a sign to remind them that they depended on God for their life and well-being.”

In the same way, by feeding them, Jesus showed them, “I too, have done what only God could do.” “Well then, give us that bread, like God did,” they ask. And Jesus says, “I AM the bread of Life. I am what God sent you from heaven to feed your spirits.”

The people and Jesus are talking at cross purposes. They want power and miracles, and Jesus wants to give them the power of God’s forgiving, sacrificial, self-giving love. He wants them to know God is with them/us always as the power and presence of love that makes life meaningful.

Of course, Jesus knows that people who hunger can't see this and truly need bread, but you and I need more than bread alone. We need the love of God to sustain us. Just as we can't thrive without bread, we cannot without God.

We are so blessed that we can focus on our spiritual hunger, which goes much deeper than food. We can focus on Jesus, who gives us bread for our spirit as we journey through life. He gives us love, mercy, acceptance, grace, hope, forgiveness, and so much more. And like the physical bread he gave the crowd who hungered, we are to share our blessings of these spiritual gifts with those who have a hungry heart.

If you remember one of my favorite quotes, Jesus is either at dinner, on his way to dinner, or on his way from dinner. He believed in the acceptance that eating together signified. He used meals as a way to give his affirmation to others. Well, Jesus again dines with us. Today, we come to Jesus’ table and hear Jesus’ words “This is my body broken for you.” He gave his life, his all, so that we would know at the heart of the universe was God who loves us, treasures us, adores us, forgives us, accepts us, and we are held in God's very heart. God will stop at nothing to bring us home.

God raised Jesus as a sign that validated Jesus’ ministry. And because of that we gather at his table to experience God’s love revealed in Jesus.

Some Christians argue how Jesus is present at the Lord's table. I am convinced Jesus is present, how he is present is I think, impossible to explain. Will Willimon quotes Calvin, saying I would rather experience it than understand it. We come to his table to experience Jesus’ presence and God’s love for us. That's why I often warn about coming to the Lord's table. Jesus is here; if we open our hearts, his spirit will come in, and we will experience his real presence.

That’s why I like the quiet time as the bread and juice are being distributed. We can reflect on Jesus with us. It is a setting where we can focus on God and what it means to trust the God revealed in Jesus' self-giving love for us.

Jesus is saying to us, gathered here, what you are offered today is just as essential as the Wonder Bread of our youth, which helped build strong bodies. This bread builds us up and all of us as individuals and together as the body of Christ.

One author in my devotions this week said you should try to determine what you want and need. We are good at what we want, but what we need, not so much. Jesus, in saying “I am the Bread of Life,” wants us to focus on what we need. Watch the commercials on TV this week or on social media and see if we are led to believe that we need several things that are not necessary, from cars to flavored bourbon. From jewelry to exotic vacations, all may be nice in their place, but they are not what Jesus tells us we need in life.

Our hunger is for meaning, purpose, love, forgiveness, acceptance, and redemption. That is what we need. And with that hunger we will come to this table. Jesus is here giving himself to us so that we may find what we truly need: the bread of life. Jesus said, “I am the bread that brings this life that you so need. With that in mind, we prepare to come to the table.