

Sunday Lesson – August 1, 2021

GOSPEL: John 6: 24-35

The Bread of Life

Context

“The text for this week sets up in much the same way as last week’s. The crowd is looking for Jesus. This time they have trailed around the lake to the new location on the other side. The new location is going to provide a new context for the interpretation of the miracles from the previous text. The crowd is still struggling with what happened. The prophet/king understanding of who Jesus is will now be stretched. It is now time for Jesus to unpack, to deconstruct, the sign. The sign was *not* about having a belly full of food. The sign is about who Jesus is. The bread that filled their stomachs now becomes the primary extended metaphor Jesus uses to stretch their understanding.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-18-2/commentary-on-john-624-35)*

Insight

“Jesus startles them by saying, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

This is a phenomenal statement! First, by equating Himself with bread, Jesus is saying he is *essential* for life. Second, the life Jesus is referring to is not physical life, but eternal life. Jesus is trying to get the Jews’ thinking off of the physical realm and into the spiritual realm. He is contrasting what He brings as their Messiah with the bread He miraculously created the day before. That was physical bread that perishes. He is spiritual bread that brings eternal life.

Third, and very important, Jesus is making another claim to deity. This statement is the first of the “I AM” statements in John’s Gospel. The phrase “I AM” is the covenant name of God



(Yahweh, or YHWH), revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14).

Fourth, notice the words “come” and “believe.” This is an invitation for those listening to place their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. This invitation to come is found throughout John’s Gospel. Believing in Jesus means placing our faith in Him that He is who He says He is, that He will do what He says He will do, and that He is the only one who can.

Fifth, there are the words “hunger and thirst.” Again, it must be noted that Jesus isn’t talking about alleviating physical hunger and thirst. When Jesus says those who come to Him will never hunger and those who believe in Him will never thirst, He is saying He will satisfy our hunger and thirst to be made righteous in the sight of God.” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/bread-of-life.html)*

Gospel Reading

“The next day the crowd that was left behind realized that there had been only one boat, and that Jesus had not gotten into it with his disciples. They had seen them go off without him. By now boats from Tiberias had pulled up near where they had eaten the bread blessed by the Master. So when the crowd realized he was gone and wasn’t coming back, they piled into the Tiberias boats and headed for Capernaum, looking for Jesus. When they found him back across the sea, they said, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus answered, “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. “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.” To that they said, “Well, what do we do then to get in on God’s works?” Jesus said, “Sign on with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God’s works.” They waffled: “Why don’t you give us a clue about who you are, just a hint of what’s going on?”

When we see what's up, we'll commit ourselves. Show us what you can do. Moses fed our ancestors with bread in the desert. It says so in the Scriptures: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus responded, "The real significance of that Scripture is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven but that my Father is right now offering you bread from heaven, the *real* bread. The Bread of God came down out of heaven and is giving life to the world." They jumped at that: "Master, give us this bread, now and forever!" Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own agenda but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me." *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

"Those who hear Jesus want something that they can do: "What must we do to work the work of God?" (verse 28, see also John 4:15). At least initially, some prefer action from Jesus rather than remaining with him. Many of us have come to love John's Gospel precisely because we didn't "get" Jesus—and when we did "get" Jesus it was because Jesus got us!

Jesus does not give work instructions but rather faith instructions: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (verse 29). What if the act of believing is kind of like the "work" in AA of surrendering to our Higher Power? Faith or trust in Jesus, the one who has come down from heaven, is the work of God for the believer: it works if you work it!

In that light, it makes sense that John never uses the noun for faith (*pistis*) but always its verbal form, *pisteuein* ("believe," "have faith," "come to faith," or "put faith"). Brown defines its use in John as denoting an active commitment to a person,

especially Jesus. Significantly, 74 out of 98 uses of *pisteuein* in John are in the Book of Signs where Jesus invites people to have continuing and active trust in him.

The second emphatic attunes his listeners to God's faithfulness today. They demand, "Sir, give us this bread always." What they demand is what they already have in the presence of Jesus: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (35).

"We can believe in justice as a thing," says artist and theologian, Elizabeth Gray King. "We can believe in love and care and kindness and humility. But until we start living and acting as love, living out that care, graciously spilling over with kindness and working with others in humility as compared to power, a belief is just a belief, almost an object to be admired ... Believing in resurrection is ok. Living resurrection is quite another thing." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Robert Hoch*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Exodus 16:4/3:14](#) "*Bread from Heaven*"/"I AM"
- [Matthew 5:6](#) *Sermon on the Mount* - "*Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness..*"

Thought for the Day

"For me the most radical demand of Christian faith lies in summoning the courage to say yes to the present riseness of Jesus Christ." ~ *Brennan Manning, Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*

A Prayer

God, our hope, As we gather now to worship you, fill us with anticipation and prepare us by your Spirit. Be the first thought in our hearts and help us to be conscious of your direction. Strengthen us for service, Nourish us with the bread of life, Transform us for mission. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask this. **Amen.**