

“Bread of Life”

John 6:25-40

April 24, 2022

Read John 6:25-40

This is the Word of the LORD.

Prayer of Invocation

A few weeks ago, we covered Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the crowds with two fish and five loaves. Then, we talked about Jesus’ walking on water. We were briefly interrupted by Palm Sunday and Easter, and now we pick up the story here the next day after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. Our focus is on the interaction between the crowds and Jesus, and so we pick up the story as the crowd discovered that Jesus and the disciples had gone across the sea. The crowd got into boats and went across after Jesus.

1. Following Jesus

Let me must stop on that point for a moment. The first line of our passage is, “When they [the crowd] found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’”

Can you think of a single time in your own life where you have dropped everything in order to seek out someone? Consider the lengths the people in this crowd went: they had gone across the sea of Galilee to see him on the mountain, spent the day with him, got up the next morning, realized he was gone, gathered boats, traveled back across the water, and found him again. That is pretty remarkable.

For many of us, it seems so foreign to our way of living. It seems like a “well, that was back then,” kind of thing. We often read these accounts and see the crowd as simpletons who just up-and-left their everyday lives; that no one would do that today. Oh, yes, we do.

Not so long ago, there was the phenomenon of the San Francisco band the Grateful Dead and their fans, known as “Deadheads.” They traveled from city to city, show to show, always seeking to be a part of the event. On Wikipedia – the on-line encyclopedia – it talks about the Deadheads this way, “for many Deadheads, the band was a medium that facilitated experiencing other planes of consciousness and tapping into deep, spiritual wells that were usually the province of organized religion ... [they] got people high whether those people were on drugs or not.”

I am not sure who would be the modern-day version of this phenomena, but the Korean K-Pop band BTS may be close. Or, how about Burning Man?

These are all examples of how people will go way out of their way to pursue to something they want. Fortunately for the people in John’s gospel, they were seeking Jesus. Unfortunately for the people in our day, they are seeking entertainment? Meaning? Community? Hope?

So here's the question: How much do you *want* to be with Jesus? Would you disrupt your daily routine to spend time with him? Or, are you comfortable with Sundays as the only day you check in? Only you (and God) know your patterns and your heart, so let that be as convicting as it truly should be.

John told us about the crowd because there was something about Jesus that people wanted more. They needed more. Unlike concerts, where the shows would eventually end; unlike festivals, where the weekends left little more than debris on the highway, there was something about Jesus that filled them up so that they went back to him for more. "Always," is what they said, asking for the bread Jesus described.

What were they hoping to find? They may not have been able to articulate it, but Jesus could.

2. Work

Here is where we need to look at the discussion between the crowd and Jesus. The key word in verses 25-34 is "work." Watch how this played out.

- When the crowd gathers and says, "How long have you been here?" it was a mild rebuke like, "Hey, what about us?" Jesus answered the rebuke by saying, "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." He was challenging them because they wanted to see another miraculous feeding and were missing the point of who he was.
- The crowd responded by saying, "What must we do to perform the work of God?" The thought here was that Jesus was talking about something tangible, something that they could literally put in their mouths. Their question asked how they must labor? In other words, what did they have to do like they did for normal bread – do the job, get paid, and then purchase their bread?
- Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, **that you believe in him whom he has sent.**" **Faith** is the work of God.

Faith is the work of God? "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast." That's what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2. Here, however, Jesus said that faith was the *work* of God. Are those two contradictory?

Not at all. Friends, we *are* saved by grace – the gift of God – **through** faith. Faith is not passive. It is active. Faith is not intellectually assenting to a proposition, it is personal commitment and engagement. Faith means we have **received** Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It means we have **committed** to being, to acting, to growing, to living as his disciples. We are Jesus' followers, which means – by definition – that we are moving as he moves. Paul's next line in Ephesians was, "For we are what he made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be *our way of life.*" Our job, our vocation, our calling, is to be servants of the living God – wherever it is he has placed us, whatever it is he has gifted us to do.

As your pastor, I cannot give you more or better faith. It is not something I can hand you, send you, text you, or build you. I can preach from the Word to feed you, but it is your responsibility to consume it. Sometimes preaching can feel like putting vegetables on a plate before a child. You can tell a child that these are good for them and they need to eat them. But watch the reaction: nose turned up, games being played as the vegetables are pushed around the plate and considered, and then there is the bargaining that takes place to get dessert without having to eat them. (Just so you know, I am not pointing the finger at any of you – I am reporting my own strategy for dealing with vegetables as a child and how I often I respond to my own preaching.) Your faith is going to grow only as you work at it – just as my faith will grow only as I work on it. Watching someone else exercise is not going to make me fit. We can help one another, we can encourage one another, we can invite and plead with one another (and we should); but only I can do the work of my faith, only you can do the work of your faith.

Being a disciple means following where he calls, how he calls, and when he calls. It means you are not your own – not that you ever really were. You belong to Christ. Back to our John 6 passage:

- The crowd perceived that Jesus was talking something bigger picture than providing bread for a large group as he had the day before. So, the question came, “Can you show us something so we can have it confirmed that we should believe in you?” In other words, if you do another miracle – another work – *then* we will believe. Then, they cited the Exodus 16 example of manna.
- Jesus took their example and used it to illustrate the misperception they were holding. They looked at the manna as a sign that Moses was a prophet; Jesus pointed out that it was God who provided them bread in their time of need.

3. Bread of Life

Jesus carried the theme of “the bread of life” through the next discourse in verses 35-51. Any time Jesus repeats a phrase or word, it is important.

Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” This is a bold statement . It is a revelation of the *sufficiency* of Christ for our salvation. He is *all* we need. His own sufficiency is why Jesus said, “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.” It means that we are not left alone to be successful in our work of faith. We will not be disappointed.

He will not turn any away who come to him. He is sufficient for their needs. To what end? Eternal life. “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” Just as Jesus was raised on that Easter Sunday morning, so he will raise us. Is there anyone or anything else that can do what Jesus is doing? No. Again, he refers back to the manna, and points out, all those who ate the manna died. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” What is that? Communion.

As Americans, we may be deceived by the ready availability of spiritual blessing. There are congregations on every corner – if you were to travel up and down Division Street, how many Christian churches are there? We tend to treat church like spiritual fast food: if we do not like the fare at one place – a theology that is too conservative or too progressive, too traditional or too contemporary – we will just go to the drive-in down the street. Or, we can hop from one livestream to another.

We are a self-satisfied people, except we find ourselves yearning for “something more.” There *is* something missing in our lives. You know people like this, you may even be someone for whom this is true: no matter how beautiful the home, no matter how wonderful the relationships with family, no matter how fulfilling is the job or volunteer work we do – something else is missing. There is a hole that cannot be filled by anything else but Jesus.

That’s the human condition. And it is the good news we have to share: we have the bread of life and there is plenty for everyone.

Years ago, then-President of Fuller Seminary, Rich Mouw, was on his way to Korea to deliver a series of lectures. He noted on his website, “Mouw’s Musings” the story of...

Horace Underwood, a graduate of New Brunswick, [who] arrived in Korea in 1885, as the first official Protestant missionary sent to that country. In 1886 he established an orphanage school, which eventually became Yonsei University, a major institution of higher education in Korea. In 1887 he established a small congregation of 14 believers, which continues today as the Saemoonan Church, now a very large church.

One thing I did in preparation for these lectures was to read Lillias Underwood’s biography of Horace, her husband. I was especially intrigued by this vignette. Sometime during the late 1880s the Underwoods met a woman from a rural village who came to them because she was interested in learning more about Christianity. In writing about this encounter, Lillias Underwood reports that the woman did not have access to any biblical writings, or any other Christian literature, but what she had heard about the Gospel was, as Mrs. Underwood puts it, “a tiny morsel of truth” that had begun to take “deeper and deeper root in the good ground of her heart.” As a result, she told the Underwoods that she had come to hold to these three beliefs. The first was that “There is only one God and we must worship no other.” The second was that “We must put away our sins, be good and pure and true.” And the third: “We must keep one day in seven holy and sing the words, Yesu We Pee Patkui Umnay” (Nothing But the Blood of Jesus).” Encouraged by the Underwoods to continue in her newfound faith, she went back to her village and told others about Jesus. Several came to faith in Christ—including a man who had been known as a very wicked person. After a while the little group was able to obtain Bibles, catechisms and hymnbooks. Eventually a church was built and after several years hundreds were attending worship services there.

That’s a nice little story about church growth. And it begins with a woman who had somehow picked up some good theology to start with. Indeed, that’s a pretty good place to

start from in our own efforts at evangelism and church planting today!
(<http://www.netbloghost.com/mouw> , March 26, 2008)

We get hungry every day. Where do we go for food? Whether we admit it to ourselves or not, we are spiritually hungry every day. Where do we go for the Bread of Life?

It is the human condition. And it is the good news we have to share: we have the bread of life. There is plenty for everyone. Our lives, our resources, everything we have has been given to us so that we might share the bread of life with those around us who are hungry. Our tangible resources are to be shared with those who are tangibly hungry. Our spiritual witness is to be shared with those who are spiritually hungry.

Conclusion

Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Next Sunday is a communion Sunday. We will come to the table that Jesus had prepared. We will come, we will see him take bread, give thanks, and break it, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Why? We will do so because we are following him. We will do so because it is the work of faith. We will do so because he is the bread of life; he is the only one sufficient for our salvation. "There is none other. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Amen.

Questions:

1. Can you think of a single time in your own life where you have dropped everything in order to seek out someone? To what lengths are you willing to go to pursue someone who has something you need?
2. How are you doing the work of your faith? What steps are you making daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, to grow as a disciple? How are you building up others as you walk alongside them?
3. Do you trust Jesus to be sufficient? How do you deal with the temptation to add something to Jesus "just to be sure"?