

I Am the Bread of Life

John 6:35-55

There's nothing like having good home-made bread. We have a bread-machine at home and I can always tell when Joanna decides to make a loaf. The aroma of the bread baking fills the house, and the taste of freshly baked bread is delicious. My father used to work for LeSturgeon's bakery in Bridgeton and I remember as a child having the opportunity to go inside the plant and watch them put all the ingredients together from the beginning of mixing the flour and yeast to the wrapping of the loaves of bread. I can still smell that good smell of that bakery. We are blessed with our own bakers here in the congregation and we are blessed with our own bakers in this congregation. I'm sure many of you recognize the Haegele family bakery. This month we will have the opportunity to hear about the history of the Haegele bakery at our adult fellowship.

Bread...it is referred to as the staple of life. It provides us with physical nourishment. We pray to God: give us this day our daily bread. What a magnificent thing it was when Jesus saw the hungry multitudes and fed the 5,000 by the Sea of Galilee. This was a time of great popularity for Jesus. The people were astonished with his teaching, they were filled with wonder when they saw the miracles. Crowds of people were following him. They began to say: Surely this is the prophet who is come into the world. If these people could have their way, they would have made him king right then and there.

And Jesus divides the loaves and fishes and feeds the multitudes. And it is at this point that Rob Fuquay, the author of our resource, *The God We Can Know*, makes an interesting observation. He points out that this is the only miracle other than the resurrection that is mentioned in all four gospels. But he also notes that while that other gospels mention that the people were fed and satisfied, that John gives us some greater insight because he says the people were fed and they were full. Rev. Fuquay makes a distinction between being full and being satisfied. Here were the people having been fed by Jesus who came looking for him the next day and it appears they were looking for another miracle. In other words, they were full, but it wasn't enough. And they press

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Jesus, “What sign are you going to give then, so that we may see it and believe you? Just yesterday, Jesus had performed this great miracle and now they are asking, “What can you do for us now?” When is enough, enough.

Jesus has to re-direct their thinking...ask them to check their motives. You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. In other words you are looking for fullness, but not satisfaction. The things of this world, the physical bread may fill you up, but they will not satisfy your soul. And so Jesus changes the focus of the conversation by pointing them to a more important kind of bread. “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life. That there are more important things than the “stuff” of this world. We can accumulate more and more things, but it will never be enough. I am always surprised whenever we have taken on a new appointment to a church, and we need to a pack, just how much stuff we have accumulated. And you wonder where does it all come from. But it’s always a reminder that most of these things are just that, material things, that in the long run, are not that important. Much more important are the things of faith...things like our relationships with people and family, the ministry we share in the church and obviously our relationship with God. That’s what Jesus is referring to when he says: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

The teaching of Jesus is very simple, and yet so profound. Yet, why do people miss it? Why do we labor so diligently for the bread that spoils and neglect the bread that gives us eternal life? Why do we get so caught up in obtaining the physical and material things of this world and give so little time to the cultivation of the things of the Spirit. We know we are a consumer driven society and it is so easy to get caught up in it. Advertisers spend millions of dollars to sell their product in order to create that hunger for more and more, trying to convince us that their product will meet our needs. The cost of a Super-Bowl ad this year for 30 seconds was 4.5 million dollars. We may be full, but never satisfied.

Certainly our generation is not the first to experience this, not even the people in Jesus’ day. In a convicting sort of way, Jesus takes his listeners back to

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the days of the Israelites travelling in the wilderness. Jesus reminds them that their forefathers ate manna in the wilderness. It was God's way of providing for the needs of his people on their journey to the Promised Land. It was God's miracle for them to care for them. But it wasn't long before the people were complaining. Some wanted to go back to Egypt. Others were not following the instructions God had given them on only gathering enough for the day. There were those who wanted to gather extra, there were those who tried to gather on the Sabbath. It was not enough to trust God who would give them just what they needed.

We struggle with the same things. Not trusting God to provide for us. We try to become self-reliant, or we fill our lives with things that we think will make us happy. We substitute the things of the world for those things that will give us real peace and fulfillment. "This is the bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." This was Jesus call to look at life from a different point of view. Not to be consumed by the bread of this world, but to feed our lives with that spiritual bread. It was a shift in focus, it was a call to deeper faith and obedience.

It's interesting that Jesus was not as popular after these sayings. Many who were following him, no longer followed him from this point on. Sometimes the words of the close of this chapter are referred to as the "hard sayings of Jesus". Because they required living by faith and not seeking fullness in the material things of life. We know it can happen to us. We can get more concerned about the earthly bread than the bread that Jesus offers us. Adam Hamilton in his book Enough, describes the difference between discontentment and contentment. And he asks, "Which tent do you live in?" "You choose it in large part by deciding what life is about. If you decide that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, then we are choosing contentment... Choosing contentment means we look to God as our Source, giving thanks for what we have. It means we ask God to give us the right perspective on money and possessions and to change our hearts each day." That's so different from the world's point of view. We know that living the faith life requires trusting God to

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meet our needs. We know it means looking beyond ourselves, looking for ways to bring the bread of life to others. Following Jesus asks to make sacrifices, to take the focus off of ourselves and on to the needs of others.

This morning we gather at the Lord's table. Once again we partake of the bread and remember what Jesus did for us. We hear Jesus calling us to labor for that bread that does not perish, that bread that endures and leads to eternal life. We used to use these words in the communion ritual as part of the invitation and as I re-read them, I thought that really our following of these words, if we took them seriously, may be no less difficult than Jesus' words to his followers 2,000 years ago:

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth, in His holy ways. Wow, that's a real challenge, but they speak of the commitment we make in the dedication of our lives to follow Christ's call to live for that spiritual food. But you know what we discover? Earthly bread might give us the feeling that we are full, but it is never enough. We discover that it is Jesus' bread, this life-giving bread, this spiritual bread that will truly satisfy. It is this bread that will continue to feed our souls and lead us to eternal life.