

**Series Title: “John’s Gospel Perspective on the Good News”**

**2 August 2015: 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

FUMC—Arlington, TX 76011

“I Am the Bread of Life”—Preaching Text: John 6:24-35

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There has never been but one question in all civilization-

how to keep a few men from saying to many men:

You work and earn bread and we will eat it

(Abraham Lincoln).

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Hear the day’s lesson, 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 (John 6:24-35).

Looking to this story we might notice the crowds’ reaction to Jesus which signals just how universal the misconception of Jesus is—true even today. Earlier Jesus has “come to them” on the water (John 6:17), but Jesus has not yet truly appeared to them in a figure that they can recognize. All this is to say that the crowds just do not get it. They did not get it when Jesus talked about the “temple” (2:19-21), did not get the meaning of “new birth” (3:3-4), or “water” (4:7-15). Now they do not get Jesus’ talk about life-giving bread. They hear Jesus on “bread,” and they

promptly guess he is talking about food. Jesus serves them by incredibly feeding them; then they attempt to make him king as we briefly talked about last Sunday (vv. 14-15). They just do not get it.

We come to the Lord's Table today because we sense that somehow in the breaking of bread we will see Jesus. In a way, every loaf of communion bread is a miracle loaf because it represents the miracle of God's love. It is a love that enters our mortal bodies. This bread we break is Jesus, the bread of life, broken for the world. But if we think that we get Jesus better than those who were fed from his hand, then we overestimate our discernment. The people followed Jesus. They go from place to place simply to hear Jesus speak or watch Jesus perform miracles. Jesus had, after all just fed 5000 people—with leftovers besides. When Jesus spoke to them about bread we assume that the crowd understood the connection between bread eaten for survival and bread that nourishes the human soul. This is what Jesus offers them. For while it is true that human beings do not live by bread alone, it is also true that we do not live long without it.

There is a miracle in the loaf. The miracle is Jesus—the bread of life. When we break bread with others we do so in the spirit of Jesus. As such, then every table becomes an altar and every meal becomes a mini-communion service. When you bless the meals before you eat, then you bless again what God has already blessed at creation.

Jesus' miraculous provision of bread recalls for John the gift of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. The crowd has mistaken Jesus for some political messiah who will free them from Roman occupation. John continues to pursue the questions: Who is Jesus? Why has he come? Is he human? Is he divine?

Jesus and the disciples, escape the crowds, but only for a while. Rather than teaching them about his walking on water (which they would misunderstand), he does not answer them. Rather, Jesus tells them that they seek him not because they understand the spiritual meaning of his food, but for another free meal (v. 26). Jesus says: raise your sights above material things, to eternal ones, to what I, "the Son of Man will give you" (v. 27). The Father has shown me to be authentic

“seal”). I will give you nourishment forever. But the disciples have only grasped that the food is miraculous, a work of God, so they ask: “how can we do such miracles” (v. 28)? Jesus answers: only one “work of God” (v. 29) is essential: to trust in me. Again, they misunderstand; they ask: “what proof will you give us” (v. 30)? Moses gave us manna from heaven in the wilderness (v. 31); you have only given us earthly food. We expect the Messiah to give us manna again. In v. 32, Jesus tries to clear up the misunderstandings: it was God, not Moses who gave you manna; the Father gives bread now; and manna met physical needs but “true bread” is more than that.

Then v. 33: Jesus himself is the true bread, the “bread of God:” he “comes . . . from heaven and gives life . . . .” They still do not grasp that he is the bread. Finally, he says: I am the sustenance of life itself, of very existence, for those who trust in me; I will fill their every need.” When asked to explain the Eucharist, John Calvin said that he would “rather experience it than to understand it.” Faithfully to feed upon the truth of who is Jesus Christ, to find primary sustenance in him, is better even than to understand him.

There was a scene that sticks in my mind from the Camp David Peace talks in mid-July 2000. There was a dinner where Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak sat eating, breaking bread, and laughing together with President Clinton. During that week there had been many pictures on CNN, UPI, and AP of troubled faces, staged handshakes, and brooding deliberations with all those involved. Yet, at the table, something else happened. Perhaps something come to pass there because enemies shared a common loaf. Enemies cannot break bread together—at least without indigestion or heartburn.

For example, often business folk will work long and work hard to hammer out a business deal. In the midst of negotiations and hard-ball deliberations, people are reluctant to yield their own self-interest. The deal looks like it may go down the drain. But on occasion . . . the negotiators go out to eat dinner together and suddenly there is a step forward.

An important moment in a family’s life is when a daughter brings home a boy—and no

one knows why she brought this one. Yet by meal's end . . . the idea of marriage seems more promising than it did only a few hours earlier. This is what I am speaking of when I speak of the miracle of the loaf.

We do not understand the depth of the miracle that occurs at table. But it should come as no surprise that Jesus uses the symbol of the broken bread to lead us into the depths of Jesus' own place in God's love for the world.

When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," take note. It is Jesus who nourishes the souls of those who are heavy-laden and hungry for abundant life. This is God's promise to us that we describe as the bread of life. Amen.