

Bread of Life
John 6:35, 41-51
12th Sunday After Pentecost
August 12, 2018
Pikes Peak UMC, Pastor Dea Sharp

John 6:35, 41-51 (NRSV)

⁵ 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.

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ 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."

As Sally read and we just heard, Jesus says: "I am the Bread of Life." (John 6:35)
He didn't say, "I am the salami of life," or "the cod liver oil of life."
No, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life."

Not something too fancy; just common ordinary bread.

In the past, on World Communion Sundays (which comes again in October) we've talked about how different cultures have breads in different forms and flavors. As a staple, bread is common. Just say the word "bread" and images of flavor, aroma, and texture pop into our minds.

Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life."

Today's reading comes just after Jesus has fed the 5000, a familiar story that is told in all four gospels. And now, the crowds are sticking to him like the gluten that makes bread!

The miracle that they've all been a part of, now has the people thinking about their ancestors in the wilderness, following Moses and getting the provision of manna from God every morning.

They're asking: "Could this man be the new Moses and will he work wonders for us?"

Back then, and too often today, too many people exist (can't call it living) without the food of hope.

They're in hope-deficient lives.

They've become pale from lack of any food; and tummies are distended because they're malnourished; and they're trying to fill themselves with food that doesn't last.

Some search, hopelessly, for the right one to come along with the food of romantic love, thinking their loneliness will vanish.

And others "gorge" themselves on material things, and don't ever have satisfaction.

Many people live, like they're waiting to die, in lives of malnourished separation, from themselves and family or old friends; estranged especially from God.

Hopelessness grows those negative relationships and can eventually starve the persons' soul!

Some of us can picture ourselves in that kind of "hungry."

The crowd sure was a motley crew of the downtrodden and hungry.

They were hungering for "something more."

So, they begin to demand that Jesus prove who he is by making some bread from heaven rise up on the spot.

(Weren't they JUST THERE seeing 5 loaves and a couple of fish become a feast for ALL them???)

Jesus knew what they needed. **So he gave them himself.**

But this wasn't exactly what they had in mind.

A relationship with a traveling preacher?

No. How 'bout roast lamb and a dark chocolate dessert?!

They wanted good food and wonders and miracles to serve their immediate satisfaction. And Jesus has to correct them, all the while feeding them.

Remember, he says, "It was God, not Moses, who gave the manna in the wilderness and it's God who gives the true bread from heaven, the bread that gives life to the world."

And boy howdy, do they want some of THAT bread!

"I am the bread of life," he says. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"

Jesus is offering a new kind of bread, one that doesn't get moldy, one that isn't temporary (like the manna was), one that nourishes forever and lasts forever, a bread that raises hope.

Kinda confusing though, isn't it?

To them AND to us.

How exactly is Jesus the Bread of Life?

And how is Jesus like and not like the manna in the wilderness?

Well, for starters, Jesus is like manna, 'cause through Jesus God reminds us that we live because God provides not what we want necessarily, but exactly what we need: some food, some love, some breath, some water, and a relationship with the One **who is** the Bread from heaven.

But, even more, Jesus is different from the manna in the wilderness because, through Jesus, we're fed with that relationship.

Wouldn't you agree that there are all kinds of reasons that people are estranged from one another and from God.

Sin is one of the biggest reasons, but the point is none of us are immune to brokenness and broken relationships.

And yet, relationships are as necessary for life as bread.

That's how God created us! We need relationships to be fully who we're created to be.

But, we also know that relationships are sometimes like tissue paper.

God knows how fragile our relationships are.

God knows how fragile our **lives** are, and that we need to be fed continually.

That's why God gives us the bread from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ, who we know is the human incarnation of God, God comes to us as the Bread of Life;

- as nourishment for the sick and lonely,
- as a banquet for those who mourn or who've bottomed out,
- a feast for the lost and rejected.

Dear Ones, through Jesus Christ, God leaves a trail of bread crumbs out of the wilderness of hopelessness and separation and into relationship, into community, into communion; a trail of bread crumbs to lead us Home.

You see, something mysterious (we can't explain it fully) happens when we start picking up those seemingly insignificant bread crumbs of life.

When we begin to eat the hope, and peace, and unconditional love **that is** Jesus Christ, we CAN realize, maybe for the very first time, that the very presence of this bread means that there is no disagreement or argument or sin too big to keep God from loving us.

This bread that Jesus calls himself, isn't just an invitation to life, **it is life**.

It gives us life because it is our hope.

It's God RIGHT HERE, in our world.

The Apostle Paul wrote, in his letter to the Ephesians that "Wherever there's humility, and gentleness, and patience, wherever there's unity in the Spirit, wherever there's peace and truth spoken in love — **THERE**, we are fed on the Bread of Life. (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Wherever that Bread is – so is Love.

And love triumphs over human sinfulness, separation, hopelessness.

It's RIGHT THERE that God's own life is given to us and for us.

That's what God has done for us in Christ.

That's how much God loves us!

And God's NOT willing to let sin and separation – from God or anyone else - be the pangs of our existence

God, instead chooses to feed us the Bread FOR Life.

So, how should we respond?

How can WE live differently from the world? Just look at our world!

Will we let differences define our relationships?

Or let disagreements cause separation?

Will the gnawing we do on controversy *feed* us?

Or, will we live lives worthy of our calling; for WHO we're created to be;

Will we imitate the One whose love rises like bread?

When Jesus fed the 5,000, the crowd remembered the days when God sent manna to feed the Israelites in the wilderness.

They even hoped Jesus was the new Moses for them.

They probably saw the potential for a leader who could bring bread from Heaven and lead an army that would protect their supply lines and keep control.

They could have been thinking "that kind of leader could rule the world!"

But Jesus didn't come to feed the world with bread that provided physical life.

Jesus came to give Himself..."I AM the Bread of ***eternal*** life."

In his explanation to the fickle crowd (and to US,) Jesus pointed to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, a service he brought to the disciples (and US) just before his death.

Jesus said to them, (in the verses just after our reading today)

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food

and my blood is real drink."

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

*"**This** is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forebearers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." John 6:53-58*

Remember these words as we come to this table.

When we take the bread, we are partaking of Jesus Christ.

We are saying, "Yes, I believe you are the Bread of Life."

Jesus Himself is the nourishment that gives us eternal life.

Amen!