

“Bread of Life”

John 6: 35, 41-51

I used to love the days when my mom had to clean up communion after church on Sundays. She would send my sister and me out in the pews with our plastic baskets to collect used communion cups. It was always a race between us to see who could finish collecting the cups first because then whoever finished first won the privilege of collecting the bread trays from the office to take to Mom.

Now, you may be thinking, “Well, that’s nice. Two daughters helping their mother out with the cleaning up of communion. How responsible of them. How unselfish.”

I could let you continue to think that of me but I must tell you the truth. Really, the race was about who got to eat the bread off the bread trays! We had this wonderful communion bread at my home church. A lady in the church made it, squares of unleavened bread, broken into bite size pieces. Now, we learned early on in this adventure that we could only eat a few pieces from the top of the trays if we wanted to stay out of trouble. We learned that we could only took a few pieces to calm the grumbling in our stomachs while Mom finished cleaning up. We only took a few pieces to tied us over until we went out to lunch with our friends and family. Just a few pieces of bread.

I could say that this was the beginning of my love of bread but as long as I can remember bread has always been one of my weaknesses. My meal is just not complete if I don't have some sort of bread. Doesn't matter what kind of bread, just as long as I can slather jelly on it.

At all the family meals, my grandmothers would make homemade biscuits. They were wonderful. Light and fluffy. No one makes biscuits like a grandma. Biscuits were a perfect compliment to any Southern home cooking. The best part is that my grandmothers would make extra biscuits to send home with me. And the bread bliss would continue after I had left grandparents' houses. And no, I didn't share with my sister.

I really love bread. Doesn't matter what kind. And I am sure that I am not the only one who feels this way. We all know that bread is the staff of life. We eat it when we just need a little snack. It is part of the four food groups. We like bread. Bread is a part of our everyday lives. It is a staple in our lives.

As well as a staple in the lives of the crowd that Jesus is addressing in this Scripture. They are not much different than you or I. Bread was a part of their everyday lives. Sometimes, it might have been all that there was to eat. Bread was a staple in their lives. It also played an important role in the religious rites. The unleavened bread at the Passover feast is the main example of this.

So we can't blame the crowd for misunderstanding what Jesus was talking about when he says that he is the Bread of Life. They know bread. They know what bread looks like and tastes like. And Jesus, well, he is not a loaf of bread.

In our text today, The crowd has been with Jesus for a few verses at this point in the Gospel of John. He has been teaching and preaching for several times now. A few verses before today's reading mentions that the Passover festival was drawing close and at this point in Scripture, Jesus feeds the five thousand by multiplying five loaves of bread and the crowd is amazed! With the festival that celebrates the Israelites escape from Egypt and God's promise of salvation coming soon, Jesus breaks bread with the crowd. And the crowd believes that Jesus is the prophet that has come to bring the Israelites escape and fulfill the promise of salvation. They were hungry and this man feed them. He satisfied their hunger, their physical hunger. And now the crowd wants him to satisfy their hunger for salvation from oppressing powers on earth. They want what he has to offer.

Jesus continues to teach because he wants the crowd to realize that there is a deeper hunger that goes beyond earthly salvation. There is a deeper hunger for a relationship with God, for the Word of God, and eternal life. Nothing on earth can satisfy this hunger. No material items will stop the grumbling in their soul. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

But the crowd just doesn't get it. They begin to question. "Who does this guy think he is?" "We know him most of our lives." "He is just Mary and Joseph's boy." "What is he talking about?" "Why won't he just be the prophet that rescues us now!?" The crowd did not like what Jesus was offering now. The crowd rejects Jesus and what he is saying. The crowd doesn't understand. The crowd wants more.

Jesus hears their grumbling among the crowd and tries a different tactic in teaching. He brings the image of Passover up again. He reminds the crowd that God provided for their ancestors as they left Egypt. God gave them bread each and every day when they were in the wilderness. God satisfied their physical hunger and tried to satisfy their spiritual hunger but it was not enough. The ancestors rejected the true Bread of Life, the Word of God by rejecting God when they complained as they wandered the desert. Their ancestors were not happy with what God offered during their wanderings. Manna and water! They complained about the manna. They whined about the manna.

Moses, their leader, became angry with them. Couldn't they see that God was taking care of them. Their ancestors wanted more. Something other than manna, Something other than bread from heaven, Something other than the bread of life.

Like their ancestors, this crowd missed the point. God was once again taking care of God's people. God was providing for their needs, physically and spiritually.

Jesus didn't come to earth to bring earthly salvation to all. Jesus came to earth to bring eternal life and to bring the Word of God to all.

That is why he is the bread of life.

Jesus, the true bread of life, came down from heaven to satisfy the grumblings of the soul, to show us how to nourish our relationship with God. Jesus came to satisfy the deepest hunger of our soul. We want a true relationship with God and through Jesus, we can achieve it.

When Jesus says that he is the Bread of Life, he is saying that he is the life-giving logos. He is the Word of God that will show us how to live in true relationship with God. Through Jesus' teachings and preaching, we are offered the Bread of life, the bread that will nourish us and give us eternal life.

When we eat of the true Bread of life, we calm the grumbling of our souls. We enter into full relationship with God. We open ourselves up to the possibilities that God holds for us as people of faith. Each time, we open our bibles we are given just a few pieces to still the grumbling. Each time, we recognize God's grace and God's goodness, we are given just a few pieces of the bread of life until we eat again in the kingdom of God.

There is also another meaning that arises for the Bread of Life when Jesus uses this phrase again in verse 51. This time, Jesus says, “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.” It is only at this point during the scripture can we understand that Jesus is talking about the communion feast. For John, the communion feast is not about one particular meal or moment in time. The communion feast was about Jesus’ life, all of Jesus’ life. It is in these words as readers we understand that Jesus is saying that through him, we as people of faith will have eternal life.

When we eat the bread and drink the cup at the communion table, we are invited to share in Jesus’ life. All of Jesus’ life including his death and his resurrection. The bread and the cup at the communion table create a relationship between us and God that has a promise of new life.

When Jesus says that he is the Bread of Life, we as people of faith are given the chance to satisfy our hunger. We are given the chance to recognize that once again, God is taking care of our needs, physically and spiritually. We do not have to ask for more. God has given us everything in the Bread of Life. All we have to do is accept the invitation to partake of the Bread of Life.

May we continue to have a love for Bread, especially the Bread of life. Amen.

