

August 9, 2009, Jody Heil preaching
Scripture: John 6: 35-51
Sermon: "The Bread of Life"

Before I was of school age my grandmother would watch me while mom and dad were at work. We would spend most of the day watching cartoons, "reading" the paper and me telling grandma what I wanted for the next upcoming holiday. Around 3:30 or 4:00 in the afternoon grandma's attention would turn to the kitchen and she would begin preparing the family meal. This was how I kept time ... 3:30 grandma starts dinner, 5:30 bread is done and pap should be home soon. Bread was the time keeper of my childhood. One thanksgiving I came home from college in a particularly domestic mood. I wanted to set the table, help prepare the food and most of all I wanted to make the bread. After all that was the one thing I knew everyone would eat. So I got all of my ingredients together, mixed them up and kneaded the dough for what seemed like hours, popped it in the oven and a while later ... took out a door stop. Since then I have discovered the wonders of bread baking machines.

The point is that bread is a staple in both our diet and our lives. The same was true for Jesus' audience. The audience to which Jesus spoke would have known that bread IS life. Fifty percent of the caloric intake for a person in Jesus' time would have been made of some form of bread. Bread was not just a nice treat you got on Sunday evenings, it was what helped you to grow, what nourished you, and what kept you alive! So what then does it mean to say that Jesus is the bread of life? Quite simply it means that Jesus is what helps us to grow what nourishes us and what keeps us alive. But these waters are far deep just to tread in the shallow end. As we dive deeper and deeper into this scripture we find that the writer of John is referencing another time when bread was of utmost importance to God's people. This reference is that of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness with Moses. When the people cried out to Moses, manna came from heaven, By paralleling this today's text with that of the Israelites in the wilderness the writer of John is trying to say something about these people in this time. Perhaps the writer is saying that this is again a time of wilderness.

"The Jews" here in this text seem to refer to those opposing Jesus' teachings. It is important to note that everyone in this story would have been a Jew. This classification of Jesus' opponents is not one of ethnic or religious attributes of Jesus' time but rather reminiscent of the division of the synagogue and the church during the writer's time. But never the less this is an important group to note. We've all been like this group at one time or another. Or, for that matter aren't we all non believers frequently, perhaps even several times a day. I know for a fact I am. Now I don't mean that we don't believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God and that he is our lord and savior as our confession of faith denotes. What I'm talking about is when we doubt God's will, or methods. I know there have been times in my life when I've sat down, prayed nope, that's not the way we're going to do this ... try it again. In fact, the acceptance of God's call to ministry comes to mind. Or perhaps we're like that person in the joke who is sitting on the front porch of his house during a flood and a car drives by to evacuate the man and the says "oh , no I'll be fine God will save me". Then a motor boat comes by and the man is now on the second story and offers to take him to safety, and the man says "oh, no I'll be fine God will save me". Finally the man is on the roof of his home and a helicopter comes by to fly him to safety and the man stands firm that God will save him. Eventually the man drowns and when he comes to God

and says “God why didn’t you save me!” God’s reply is “Well I sent you a car, a boat and a helicopter what else did you want?” It’s a funny story but one that holds a lot of truth in it. How often do we turn our noses up to this bread? How often do we desire for gourmet meals with elegant presentation for our Jesus feast? When I was in college we used to talk about getting our Jesus meat during Bible studies the idea was that meat was something you had to chew, you had to cut up that took a lot to digest, we were getting our Jesus meat.

We live in a hungry world. We live in a world where children are starving everyday but also we live in a world that is hungry for something, someone, some quick fix to hold on to. You can see evidence of this if you go on to google.com and type in self-help countless links will pop up trying to sell you this or that idea about how to be thinner, richer, happier, healthier, or any other number of traits society tells us are desirable. Go to a bookstore and I guarantee you as soon as you walk in the door within your view will be some book promising to fix all of your woes. WE LIVE IN A HUNGRY WORLD. More than that WE ARE HUNGRY PEOPLE. We hunger for love, for satisfaction, for prosperity, for relationships, we hunger FOR LIFE.

About a year and a half ago I went with seminary students from all over the United States to Israel / Palestine. There were students from California, Arizona, Colorado and Kentucky. When we got off the plane we hit the ground running attending meetings with community, religious and government leaders. It was late by the time we had finally stopped for dinner and we were all starving. For many of us it was our first time we had ever been in an Arab country so we had no idea what the local fare would include. Obviously we’ve all done our research and knew what we would be allergic or disgusted by but as far as what anything would taste like we had no idea. We went to a little family restaurant and were seated at a long table. The table was tight, we were shoulder to shoulder, after drinks were served the meal came out. I would say there were about two platters of pita, babaganoush, hummus and olive oil for the whole table. At first we all minded our manners and asked “would you please pass” and “thank you” and “if you don’t mind”. Pretty soon it became apparent that our well manneredness wasn’t getting far and soon someone said “The heck with it” and just reached over the table, ripped some bread and dipped it in the hummus. Soon we all joined it. You would’ve thought we had never eaten. Suddenly it didn’t matter if you bumped up against someone else because we were hungry! I’m sure the people around us thought our guide never fed us! As we all got our hungers satisfied the next course came out ... we had no idea there was more ... we were excited about the bread.

Folks, wake up and smell the bread! We’ve got it right here! The bread of life, given for us. It’s free! And it’s there to be consumed! We didn’t do anything to deserve it but we are sooo hungry for the life in which it offers us. Dig in! Forget your manners, forget humility, this is the bread of life, and its yours! Bon appetite!

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