

John 6: 35, 41-51

From Bread to Life

April 6, 2014

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Have you ever noticed how our lives revolve around food? Of course you have. Most of us eat three meals a day. That adds up to 1095 meals per year per person, snacks not included. Many if not all of our social activities include food – dinners to celebrate our anniversaries, birthdays, Valentine’s, or having friends over to share a meals and catch up. Even here at the church, food is a great community connector, be it the soup lunches, potluck dinners, the community dinners, or receptions after a concert or a funeral. Even the cookies with your coffee or tea after worship are an important part of the fellowship that food encourages. What we do is steeped in history, spirituality, and ritual.

The Bible is filled with references to food with bread being the most important source of nourishment. Many of Jesus’ miracles, teachings, parables and his ministry involve food. The story in today’s Gospel reading is one of them. It is about food, but not the type you would expect.

It takes place shortly after Jesus has fed the 5000 with the five loaves of bread and two fish. He has left Capernaum with the disciples, but the crowd followed and found them. The people were still hungry. They wanted Jesus to once again give them physical food, but he wanted to offer them a different kind of food: spiritual food.

He 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.”

To me, this is one of the most beautiful, most poetic, phrases in all the New Testament. The meaning packed into these few words is profound. Now people understood what he was saying and yet at the same time they were confused. They understood the reference to bread. Bread

was usually the main course, and therefore life-giving. Everything depended on the daily bread they worked so hard for. But when he said that he is the bread of life he went beyond their understanding.

By “life” Jesus is talking about something far more than just our physical existence. Jesus is talking about “real” life – our relationship with God. Jesus is talking about that relationship of trust and obedience and love. Our relationship with God is made possible through “the bread of life” – through Jesus. Certainly, it’s possible for us to exist without Jesus to get closer to God; lots of people do. But to us Jesus is telling us that that’s not really life, not the full, abundant life that God created us to have and live.

And the fact is we all hunger, deep down in our souls, for that abundant life. All of us thirst for something more out of life, even when we’re not sure just what it is that we need.

By saying “I am the bread of life,” Jesus is telling us that, if we want to live life to its fullest, we have to have Jesus in our lives. The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Jesus, when we know God through Jesus. Only then will our restless souls settle down; our hungry hearts be satisfied.

Jesus is presenting us with a new vision for our lives, a new, deeper relationship with God. Jesus connects us with and makes us participants of the divine life.

What I believe Jesus wants to convey is that God is reaching out to us, providing a way for grace, opening the doors for the holy to live among us: again and again and again.

You can't get much closer to something than when you eat of it. Taste, smell, and sight remind us, tell us, about who God is.

It has been like this from the beginning . . . I can imagine the rich earth that produces fruit as described in those early chapters of Genesis. I can hear the stories of people gathering around food and the promise of a land "full of milk and honey."

I can also hear the prophetic call for us not to forget about those who hunger . . . after all God has never forgotten, has always provided. And so should we

In our eating and our drinking we too participate in this long story of a God who "feeds" and a people who serve. In fact, when we eat and when we drink, when we become part of the central activity and posture of our life together, the central reason for our gathering--we too are saying that God's will for all of us . . . all of us . . . and all the world is to be restored, saved, healed, made whole!

When we come and partake of this "bread of life" it is in the hope that you and I will find ourselves part of a new reality, transformed into God's own, pushed, propelled, into the reality of God's kingdom in the world.

The hope is that in eating this bread of life we are recognizing our own dependence on God and recognizing our own needs and the needs of our world around us.

The question is: do we gather week after week like those that day who came looking for another awesome sign? Do we gather around the Lord's Table looking for the "magic," for that spiritual "fix," and by that missing or ignoring the subversive and life transforming power of Jesus' own presence in this bread that is God's body in the world?

Or do we take courage and allow this Bread of Life to change us, challenge us? And if the answer is yes, what might that look like?

For the next two months, our Outreach committee will offer programs around the theme of *Hunger*. At their January retreat, the committee decided that this is an important topic for us to explore. We know that hunger for many people, be it in our own community and around the world is a real issue. Join us for a panel discussion next week after church. Join us for an Outreach Day on Saturday, May 3, at Hope Church in Dorchester, and be part of our congregational food drive.

By lifting up some of the issues that keep too many from abundant life, we join the many who seek to make this world a better place for all to live.

The community called the church is at its core a community of people who hunger. A community of people called together around table, whose own identity is rooted in what it means to be sustained by the presence of Christ each and every time we gather together.

From the very beginning of the story of faith, God has cared and loved and provided for us with abundance, but also called us to take this abundance and use it as a source of being the light of and to the world on behalf of God's kingdom. We are called to bring life, and love, and life-giving bread to a hungry, hungry world today.

As we come to this table, may we not just taste bread and juice, but may we realize how this bread of life is sustaining us each and every day, and how, each time we share it, it brings us in to a closer relationship with God and each other. And ultimately, may we become the community who lives out the meaning of sharing in the life of Jesus to a hungry world.

There are many who are looking, many who are hungry; there are many who are searching. May we become the body that feeds them; may we become the body that proclaims the identity of the bread of life to this broken and hungry world.

Amen.