

Got Bread
August 2, 2009
John 6:24-35 (The Message)

22-24The next day the crowd that was left behind realized that there had been only one boat, and that Jesus had not gotten into it with his disciples. They had seen them go off without him. By now boats from Tiberias had pulled up near where they had eaten the bread blessed by the Master. So when the crowd realized he was gone and wasn't coming back, they piled into the Tiberias boats and headed for Capernaum, looking for Jesus.

25When they found him back across the sea, they said, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26Jesus answered, "You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs—and for free.

27"Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last."

28To that they said, "Well, what do we do then to get in on God's works?"

29Jesus said, "Throw your lot in with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God's works."

30-31They waffled: "Why don't you give us a clue about who you are, just a hint of what's going on? When we see what's up, we'll commit ourselves.

Show us what you can do. Moses fed our ancestors with bread in the desert. It says so in the Scriptures: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32-33 Jesus responded, "The real significance of that Scripture is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven but that my Father is right now offering you bread from heaven, the real bread. The Bread of God came down out of heaven and is giving life to the world."

34 They jumped at that: "Master, give us this bread, now and forever!"

35-38 Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own whim but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me.

**This is the Word of God and It can be trusted.
Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray -- Gracious God, we praise your Name and we thank you for your bountiful and generous love. We call upon you this day and ask that you would help us seek the blessings which endure unto eternal life. Help us open our hearts to your inward presence, our minds to the messages that you write upon the passing hours and days, and our souls to the refreshing winds of your Spirit. Feed us with the bread of heaven and grant that our

prayer and our praise might be acceptable unto you – and that our words and our actions might glorify you, both now and forevermore. Amen

Are you familiar with the expression, "When you are out of peanut butter, you are out of food." I remember hearing it some years back and at the time I am sure that I didn't give it a second thought. For as far back as I can remember, peanut butter has been my favorite when it comes to candy and deserts. I didn't have my first peanut butter and jelly sandwich until I was a junior in college. I fell in love. It was the most amazing thing I had ever had. Even then, I never considered it to be important as a staple food product. It was more like desert for lunch or dinner.

Recently I was told that I have diabetes and need to be more aware of what I eat, especially my carbohydrate and sugar intake. Almost immediately my body decides that it cannot live without peanut butter and jelly. It has become a must have food for me; one that I just simply have to have at least 3 times a week. How many of you have a food that you feel that way about? What, for you, is the bottom line when it comes to food; that, which for you is the most needed staple in your diet?

If you are like me, it's peanut butter. For Donna, I know this is not the case! She hates peanut butter. When I'm having lunch or dinner by

myself, I'll have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole-wheat bread.
"The peanuts and wheat and fruit are a complete meal."

Some people may say that peanut butter is a "comfort food," and after giving it some thought I suppose that would be true for me. If I had to survive the rest of my life on one thing, peanut butter and jelly would definitely be it.

In English, the word "bread," in some contexts, is synonymous with food. In some Melanesian dialects, the word for "yam" and the word for "food" are the same. Amongst Asian cultures, the same applies to rice. It's whatever the bottom line is. It's the basic thing you need to stay alive. Bread is the biblical metaphor for this because bread was the staple, basic, bottom-line food of Jesus' time. If Jesus had been Asian, he may have spoken about rice. Jesus, however, wasn't Asian and He didn't speak about rice; He spoke about bread.

So our scripture reading today tells us that it was bread the crowd was looking for when they sought Jesus on the other side of the lake. Jesus had made his way to the other side of Lake Tiberius from where he had recently performed the miracle of feeding the crowd of thousands with five loaves and two fish. When the crowd noticed that Jesus was no longer among them, they sought Him out. They came to Him in Capernaum and said to him -- "Rabbi, when did you get here".

Note the emphasis here in their inquiry. The crowd who gathers in Capernaum does not ask *how* Jesus got there ahead of them. They were aware that Jesus had not gone with disciples in the boat the evening before. Rather than question how He managed to get to Capernaum ahead of them, they ask Jesus, "*When* did you get here?"

Jesus responds by saying: "I tell you the truth; you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."

It is good to have your fill of bread. It would be my prayer that all people would have their fill each day! It would be my prayer that we with so much food would share it with those who have none! It would be my prayer that , as with the manna from heaven that Israel ate in the wilderness, there would be enough food for each one of us; day after day; week after week, month after month, year after year. For most of us, this is the case and for all of us, it should be. The fact is, there is enough of a food supply in the world for everyone to be adequately fed; every man, woman, and child. The problems in carrying out this reality are too many to name and are a topic for another day.

Here in today's scripture reading, we are reminded of our own shortfall, as we, like the crowd, come to Jesus only for the bread that satisfies our bodies one day and leaves us hungry the next. We turn to Him only for the physical and immediate blessings of this world and thus we miss

the significance of who Jesus is. Equally alarming, we then in turn miss the significance of what life itself is all about. Jesus indicates this when he says, "You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" He then cautions the crowd by saying, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

In our own fears and insecurities it is so easy to miss the deeper meaning of things. It is so easy to focus our attention on the gratification of our physical needs that we forget that there are greater things to be had, things that satisfy not only the body, but the soul. Bread is a good image for all this, because bread is important to all of us. If you don't think bread is important, then let the waitress at your favorite restaurant fail to bring you a loaf or basket of bread before dinner. I guarantee most of us here would realize its absence and probably have a thing or two to say about it.

I mentioned earlier this morning that there is more than enough bread, more than enough food, produced in the world to feed everyone on this planet. Yet thousands perish each day for lack of food. They perish, in part, because of the fears of those of us who have food. We fear that we will not have enough, that if we share what we have, we will be forced to live with less. Think of the sin of it all; the blindness; the lack of understanding; the lack of trust; the lack of love.

Large wholesalers of food toss out tons of food that has come to its expiration date rather than distribute it to places and persons who are in need. The same is true for restaurants, delis and local markets. They are forced by policy and law to dispose of their food, rather than give it away.

As a society, as a country, we are driven by our sense of need, by our desire to have more for ourselves. We are driven by our inability to imagine any other reality, by which life might be measured. We divide our communities into two groups, the "*haves*" and the "*have nots*." It is as the old adage says, "Those with the most toys win." And so people starve in the midst of plenty.

Jesus said to them, "You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."

John's Jewish listeners would have understood all the underlying themes of chapter six from which this week's gospel reading comes. Our reading last week, the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water, parallels with the way God conquered the sea at the time of the Exodus and with the way God fed Israel in the wilderness. John's purpose, and the purpose of the signs and marvels that Jesus performs, is to say that Jesus is more than a new Moses; that he has come to do more than simply lead the people out of physical slavery and into a land flowing with milk and honey. He has come to share with them the fact that He is one with God and that He has come to deliver *all* people from their bondage to sin and death; to

bring to us the fullness of the kingdom of God. Through the fullness of the Kingdom Jesus offers us eternal life and a chance to satisfy our hunger and our thirst with bread and water that has no end.

Amongst all the signs and wonders that Jesus has performed, amongst all the miracles and teachings, the crowd has somehow managed to miss this. They see Jesus as a simple wonder worker, as one who performs signs and fills stomachs; and Jesus does these things. He is a wonder worker. Jesus does perform signs and fill stomachs, but He is so much more than that.

Jesus knows that the bread of this earth does little to satisfy. Jesus knows that men, woman, and children will grasp after it and seek it, just as the Israelites did with the manna in the wilderness. That is, they will grasp and seek to acquire more than they need for each day and that in the end they will still die. Even more so, their sins, *our sins*, expressed by the desire to hoard what we have and to refuse to heed the voice of God will cause others to die. If we are to gain abundance, then we must give, if only a little; of our time, our tithes and our talents.

Jesus is more than a wonder worker. He is more than just someone who is able to provide the food that our bodies need; more than one who is able to provide that which already exists in abundance upon this earth. Jesus came to feed us with what lasts unto eternal life. He came to give us the bread of life. Jesus is in fact that bread. If we believe in Him, put our

whole trust in Him, He is able to nourish us unto eternity . . . Jesus is the bread of life. When asked, "Well, what do we do then to get in on God's works," Jesus says, "This is the work God requires", the work that provides food that endures to eternal life, is "to believe in the one He has sent". "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty."

A Roman writer once referred to what he observed taking place amongst the culture of his time as "bread and circuses." That is, the government kept the Roman populace happy by distributing free food and staging huge spectacles. Look around the world today. It is like it was so long ago. It is full of people who have had their fill of the bread of this earth. They are longing for something more, they are seeking for something that will provide them with satisfaction for the long haul, not just for the short term. For some, they believe that they will find it in their pursuit of more earthly blessings; a new car, bigger TV, XM radio, a new family pet. Alas, in all their efforts and all their pursuits, they continue to find themselves empty and desolate; still longing for something more. The Romans believed that if they provided enough food and pleasure to each of their citizens, then their people would be happy and their civilization would last forever. They were wrong.

Clearly there are more important things to seek than the bread of this world which spoils and rots; clearly there is more to life than the pleasures

of the flesh which last only as long as they are indulged. "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." How incredible is that. In Shakespeare's play Hamlet, our leading man Hamlet says to Horatio "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Indeed, there is more to be gained than is dreamed of by those who eat only the bread of this earth.

We are called by God, the giver of life, to eat the bread of life, that bread provided by Him and through Him and in Him. Through Christ Jesus, that bread is shared amongst this community of faith so openly each Sunday. We receive it by faith and through faith it builds us up. It nurtures us and encourages us in the one who came to give it to us; the one who was with God at the beginning and through whom all things were made.

As we celebrate the Lord's Supper each Sunday, we celebrate how the One whom we call the Bread of Life is given to all who are at the table, that they may eat and live. For those who are being harshly oppressed, the table of the Lord speaks of an exodus or deliverance from bondage. For those believers who are rejected or imprisoned for their faith, the Bread and the Cup reveals the life of the One who was rejected by His own people but in turn has become "the chief cornerstone". For those who face discrimination based on race, gender, socio-economic standing or sexual orientation, the table of Christ enables them an opportunity to partake of one food and to be

made one people. For those who are affluent and at ease with life, the Bread and the Cup offers a reminder of the life that Christ shares with us all and encourages us to share what we have with others. For those who are isolated by politics, war or geography, the Lord's Supper unites us with all God's people in all places and all ages. For a sister or a brother who is near death, the Last Supper becomes a doorway into the Kingdom of our loving Father.

Today, let us go past what we see on the surface of this world, look past the immediacy of our physical needs and celebrate the one who brought this world's life out of the deep unordered waters of creation, and who in Christ Jesus gives us the bread of life that we may eat and never die. The table of the Lord is set so that together we may be made strong in this world and prepared to enter the world to come.

So my question for you is this, "Got Bread?" If so, then praises be to our God and King for the assurance of your salvation. If not, then what are you waiting for? What's holding you back? Let go today of those earthly passions that you have in your sights and look to the one whom God sent. As Jesus told the crowd so many years ago, His words to us are echoed today. Jesus said, "The real significance of the Scripture is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven but that my Father is right now offering you bread from heaven, the real bread. . . the Bread of Life." Won't you seek relationship with Him today? Blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen!