

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. Next Friday and Sunday we will gather together to remember and celebrate the central events in human history—the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Over the past four Sundays, we have been turning our attention to these events by way of the holy meal that Christ gave to His church.

As you read through the Gospel record, you can't help but notice that meals were central to the earthly ministry of Jesus. He ate with friends, with followers, with outcasts, and enemies, but the last meal that Jesus ate was a ritual meal—the Passover Meal. Once a year, faithful Jews gathered in Jerusalem to remember and celebrate the event in which God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. As Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, He reinterpreted this holy meal in terms of His own coming death on the cross.

Taking bread, He broke it, gave thanks to God for it, and then gave it to His disciples saying, *“Take and eat; this is my body.”* In the same way, after supper, *“he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*¹

Jesus' last supper has come to be known by many different names: the Lord's Supper, the Mass, Communion, and Eucharist. But in spite of the different names and the different emphases in different church traditions, nearly all Christians agree that this is *A Holy Meal* and that it's central to Christian life and practice.

So far we have looked at this meal in terms of remembrance, communion, renewal of covenant, and mercy; this morning I want to open the Scripture with you and speak of this meal in terms of *nourishment*.

illus: As I begin this morning, I want to direct your attention to something that is basic—and common—to our human experience, namely, hunger. All of us know what it is to feel hungry; perhaps you're hungry right now and you're thinking about your next meal. But while hunger is basic to the human experience, all of us need to be trained—by our parents—to recognize hunger for what it is.

Those who are currently parents of infants or toddlers know this full well. When your baby begins to cry, you go through a brief checklist: are they tired, wet, or hungry? If they've just woken up from their nap, and their diaper has recently been changed, it's quite likely that they are hungry. Parents learn to pay attention to the signs.

When a parent notices that their 3 year old is irritable, lethargic, or complains that their stomach hurts, parents recognize the signs—maybe they are hungry. 3 year olds don't tend to plan ahead. They haven't learned to anticipate when they will be hungry, and that's why their parents bring snacks along everywhere they go. But, as children grow, they learn to recognize the signs for themselves; they know when they're hungry and they instinctively turn to food.

Here's the question, *Do you know that your soul is hungry?* Hunger is basic—and common—to every human body, and in the same way, it is basic—and common—to every human soul. Do you know that

¹ Matthew 26:26-28

your soul is hungry? And, do you know what will satisfy your soul's hunger?

Perhaps you are here this morning and attending church is very new for you. Perhaps life hasn't worked out the way you've thought it would and you find yourself wondering if there is a God out there, somewhere, who might have something to say about life. Or perhaps life has turned out the way you planned, you've got it all, and yet you sense there has to be something more. Perhaps you're here today because you are keenly aware that the hunger you feel cannot be satisfied by the things you are currently pursuing.

In John 6:35, Jesus declared, "*I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*"

We're going to take a closer look at Jesus' claim and I want to invite you to open your Bible with me to John 6:35-58. If you are using the Blue Bible in front of you, you can find our text on page **866**.

In order to understand what Jesus says here, we need to start by looking at John 6:1-15. I'm not going to read these verses, but I would like to briefly re-tell the story.

Jesus and His disciples went up on one of the hills surrounding the Sea of Galilee and it wasn't long before a great crowd began to gather. It was likely close to meal time, because when Jesus saw the crowd approaching His first concern was whether they had something to eat.

John tells us that Jesus "*already had in mind what he was going to do,*" but He asked one of His disciples, Phillip, a faith-stretching-question. "*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*" Phillip didn't have a solution but he was quick to point out the impossibility. "*It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!*" Another disciple, Andrew, found a young boy with five barley loaves and two small fish and brought it to Jesus. Jesus took the young boy's meal, miraculously multiplied it, and then fed the crowd of 5000+.

As John recounts this story, he doesn't refer to this multiplication as a miracle (though it certainly was); instead, he calls it a "*sign.*" We all understand the purpose of a *sign*—a *sign* tells us something, it points to something. A traffic *sign* might tell us to turn left or right; a billboard *sign* might tell us what to buy. Even a hunger pain can be a *sign*—it tells us that our body needs food. *Signs* are all around us—they are meant to make us aware.

A boy's lunch became a meal for 5000. A miracle? Yes. A *sign*? Absolutely, and the people picked up on it right away. The crowd in front of Jesus had grown up on stories of how God had worked in Israel's history. When God led Israel out of Egypt, they passed through the desert on route to the land God had promised to them. The desert is a difficult place to find food, and so the people came to rely on God's provision. Every morning when they awoke, God had covered the ground with came to be known as manna—bread, bread from heaven. Manna was a miraculous *sign* of God's faithful love and provision.

When Jesus multiplied the bread and fish, it was a *sign* that reminded them of God's past provision. The crowd was excited, they wanted to

keep Jesus around, and maybe even make Him King. But Jesus knew what was in their hearts, He knew they had misinterpreted the *sign*, and so He and His disciples left the crowd and travelled to the other side of the lake.

The story continues in vs. 25. The crowd found Jesus on the other side of the lake, but Jesus knew they were looking for another free meal. Jesus said to them, vs. 26, *"Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."*

28 Then they asked him, *"What must we do to do the works God requires?"* **29** Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."* **30** So they asked him, *"What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"* **31** Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: *'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'*

32 Jesus said to them, *"Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* **34** "Sir," they said, *"always give us this bread."* **35** Then Jesus declared, *"I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

Do we have any bread lovers among us this morning? I love bread, especially bread that is thick, or dense, or crusty. Give me a nice rye

bread, or sourdough, or a long, thin, french baguette.

Jesus used bread as a metaphor to make a statement about Himself and about our hunger. Hunger and thirst is basic to our human experience. Jesus reminds us that just as our bodies require nourishment, so too do our souls. Bread can satisfy a stomach, but it takes Living Bread to satisfy the soul.

We are well practiced in detecting physical hunger; when our stomach begins to growl, it's a sign that we need to eat something. Spiritual hunger is no less real but our awareness of this hunger is much less developed.

Many of us live unaware of our spiritual hunger because it manifests itself in unexpected way. If you sit around waiting for an overwhelming of need to pray, to worship, to seek God, you may be waiting for a long time. Our spiritual hunger is often masked by the material, relational, or emotional. Do you ever feel insecure, lonely, or overwhelmed? Do you ever feel bored? Dissatisfied? Do you find yourself longing for an unexplained "more"? Do wish you could start over, do something else, *be* someone else? Are you longing for meaning, purpose, or significance?

These longings, and many others, are directly tied to our soul's hunger for God. But since we don't know what these things have to do with God, we don't recognize that our soul that is hungry, and we end up trying to satisfy this hunger with material things.

When we're bored, we try to bring more adventure into our lives. We take up skydiving or bungee jumping, we plan a trip someplace

exotic, we take up a new hobby, we renovate our house, or search out a new relationship.

When we feel insecure, we might surround ourselves with friends, or engage in non-stop activity, or binge on Netflix, or video games—anything that will drown out our internal questions. We could just as easily throw ourselves into our work, our studies, or relationships, looking for the acceptance and affirmation that we cannot find within. We might use social media to craft a beautiful, confident, or exciting image for others, hoping to convince ourselves that our life is more satisfying than it really is.

When we find ourselves hungering for purpose, meaning, and significance, we might explore a new job opportunity, or we might go on a quest to find our true “passion.” And if we sense a deficiency in the love category, we’re after, we might exchange our old relationships for new ones that promise to deliver more excitement or romance, but we’re seeking after is more satisfaction.

Gordon Smith writes, “The church has always recognized that the great danger...in life...is that we seek satisfaction for our souls in something other than God. What Scripture attests to again and again is that only God can satisfy the deepest longings of our lives”.²

Our culture regularly tells us that there is no God, that we are purely material beings, and that this life is all that there is. But in spite of this narrative, we are—all of us—incurably spiritual creatures: we hunger for meaning, we thirst for significance, we long for the

transcendent. And the pursuit of the material cannot satisfy these longings.

Jesus is the solution to your soul's hunger. Jesus said, “*I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*”

Jesus warned the crowd against pursuing the satisfaction of their stomach to the neglect of their spiritual hunger. Jesus warned them, and us, about pursuing what is temporary and missing what is forever.

Forever is a long time isn't it? We can wait in traffic for 20 minutes and complain that it's “taking forever!” We can be hunting for a new job, or waiting for Mrs. or Mr. Right and lament that it's “taking forever!” We can live for years with chronic pain and it feels like forever, doesn't it? It isn't. Forever is a really, really, long time. In fact, it's difficult to talk about “forever” and “time” in the same sentence because “time” has a beginning and an end, “forever” doesn't.

In vs. 40, Jesus said, “*my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.*” God's desire is that **everyone** who looks to Jesus and put their trust in Him will have a forever life with God.

Your gender, your ethnicity, and your age—none of these disqualify you. Your parents, the place you grew up, your past failures don't disqualify you. Your present troubles, your questions, and even your excuses don't disqualify you; Jesus came to give you life.

² Gordon Smith, *A Holy Meal*, 88-89.

In vs. 47-51, Jesus said, “*Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*”

Jesus was speaking about the death He would die upon the cross. Jesus carried our sin and shame to the cross; He died in our place, for our sake. The Bible regularly describes “sin” as breaking relationship with God. In ignoring God, rejecting God, or seeking satisfaction apart from God, we cut ourselves off from the Giver of Life.

Again, Jesus said, “*I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.*”

The Bible describes “becoming a Christian” in many different ways, but here, Jesus describes it simply as *a coming to Him and a believing in Him*. When we *come to Jesus* we leave certain things behind—we leave behind our self-reliance, our pride, our achievements. God doesn't invite us into relationship on the basis of our own merit; we aren't invited because we are worthy, Jesus invites us because we are loved. We aren't invited because He needs us, we are invited because we need Him.

Becoming a Christian means *coming to Jesus and believing in Jesus*. We give up the notion that we can live without God and still find satisfaction for our soul. We give up the notion that we can make

ourselves right before God and come to celebrate the truth that Jesus's perfect life, His perfect sacrifice on the cross is what makes us right with God—it doesn't depend on **your** effort but on **His** mercy.

You may have noticed that apart from my opening remarks, my sermon has been curiously absent of any talk related to the Lord's Supper. In John 6, Jesus speaks about hunger and thirst in terms of our spiritual longings; thus far I've spoken to you about **satisfaction** and **salvation**. In the time remaining, I want to talk about how **satisfaction**, **salvation**, and **sustenance** come together in the *Holy Meal*.

People eat food for all kinds of reasons. Some people eat in order to forget, to escape, to self-medicate. Some people eat to enjoy—so much variety, so much flavour. But everyone eats in order to nourish their body; we cannot live without eating. God has designed our bodies in such a way that by eating our strength and vitality is sustained. *Spiritually speaking, how does God sustain our strength and vitality?*

Let's take another look at John 6, beginning in vs. 53. Jesus said, “*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. 57 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.*”

We can read this text in one of two ways; either Jesus is making cannibalism a hallmark of Christian spirituality, or, He is speaking symbolically. On the night Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and sentenced, He ate a final meal with His disciples. Taking bread, He broke it, gave thanks to God for it, and then gave it to His disciples saying, "*Take and eat; this is my body.*" In the same way, He gave them a cup saying, "*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*"

The disciples understood that Jesus was speaking metaphorically, the bread and the wine were symbols that pointed to a spiritual reality. Before He died, Jesus was making it clear that He would give His own flesh and blood for the sake of the world. The language of sacrifice is clear—His life for our life. But why did Jesus refer to His own flesh and blood as a meal? What spiritual reality was Jesus revealing?

Satisfaction, salvation, and sustenance come together in the person of Jesus Christ. As human beings, our lives are not self-sustaining; we cannot live without food, nor can we truly live without Jesus. Jesus is the only One who can **satisfy** the deepest longings of your life. Jesus is the only One who can **save** you and lead you into a forever life with God. And Jesus is the only One who can **sustain** you along life's journey. A big meal will only take you so far, you will need to eat again, and in the same way, Jesus meets us, satisfies our hunger, but we need to return again and again to feed on Him and receive from Him all that we need.

Left to myself, I tend to evaluate my life in terms of my achievements and failures. Left to myself, I tend to obsess about the gap between where I am and where I *should* be, and the gap between

who I am and who I *should* be. Left to myself, I can be paralyzed by, or sometimes controlled by the attitudes and opinions of others. Left to myself, I could become convinced that more power, more influence, more money, or better looks would make for a life filled with satisfaction.

But here, at this Holy Meal, I come to meet with Jesus. Here, my achievements and failures, the gap between who I am and who I think I should be fade away in the light of His love for me. Here, at this Holy Meal, I remember that I am His invited guest and that what He thinks of me matters more than the attitudes and opinions of others. It's here that I remember that Jesus alone can satisfy the deepest longings of my life.

I cannot **satisfy**, **save**, or **sustain** my own life; I need Jesus—we all do. And so we come to this Table, seeking to feed on Christ, in our hearts, by faith. As we come to Christ, He works in us through the Holy Spirit to nourish and sustains us.

Prayer: At this time I want to ask the worship team to come and join me on stage and as they do, please bow your heads with me in prayer.

- **pray for salvation, satisfaction, and sustenance**

The Lord's Supper: At this time I would like to invite those who are serving to come and take their place. We will have three serving station up front, and one/two in the balcony. As the band begins to place, please make your way to those serving the bread and cup; please come forward, row by row, beginning with the back row.

As you wait for your turn to come forward, feel free to reflect on Jesus, or to listen for what Jesus might say to you. You can also feel free to join in the singing.

Worship

Benediction: May the Lord satisfy you with His unfailing love, that you may sing for joy and be glad all of your days.³

³ Psalm 90:14.