

Message for August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Jesus the Bread of Life, Week 3 (John 6: 35, 41-51)

So; week 3 of Jesus as the Bread of Life story from chapter 6 of John's gospel. To catch us up on the last two weeks, week one's story was the miracle of the loaves & fishes—Jesus fed 5,000 people who came to him just with 2 rolls of bread and 5 little fish. In essence Jesus is replicating God's feeding the Israelites with manna—also known as the bread from heaven. It seems, however, that many missed the fuller implication of Jesus' miracle. In last week's gospel reading, we heard Jesus tells the crowd who followed him across the Sea of Galilee to believe in him as the one whom God had sent to give them the true bread from heaven. Yes, God had provided their ancestors with food--manna while crossing the desert to the Promised Land; and yes, Jesus too had fed the people who had gathered that day to hear him preach and be healed. It's like he's telling the people to look for the deeper meaning of this miracle – God sent Jesus to be more than a provider of bread and fish, he is the **true bread** from heaven. For those with ears to hear and hearts to believe, Jesus will feed their souls.

The story continues and this week we heard Jesus explaining to the crowd that he is also the **living bread** that came down from heaven. Again another reference to bread! As I was preparing this sermon, it occurred to me how bread is an important and recurring thread throughout the bible, in both Old and New Testaments. A quick check of the website 'biblegateway.com', bread is mentioned more than 280 times in the old and new testaments, 58 times just in the 4 gospels; which tells us the key role and importance of bread in the lives of humanity over the millennia. Every culture has some form of bread. "Give us this day our daily bread." we're taught to pray. Bread sustains us, fills us and nourishes us, it keeps us alive. And references to bread pepper Jesus' parables, and his teachings.

Jesus told the gathered masses "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry..." (John 6: vs 35). Within each of us is a spiritual hunger, a yearning for connection with the one who created us. As much as we needed the love of our moms and dad, we need just as much, to love and be loved by God. We all have the need to connect with the love of God our Creator, our Heavenly parent, the one from whom all things flow. And for Christians, we turn to Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. Want to know what God would be like if God was a person? Well, look no further than Jesus!

This spiritual hunger we all feel is a force that can drive human will and behaviour as much as the need to fill empty bellies can. Yet it's a need we don't always recognize within ourselves. It is a hunger, a yearning that when unrecognized for what it is, can manifest itself in various emotional distresses. Or we try to use other very non-spiritual and less healthy ways to fill that spiritual

emptiness: like for instance with food, alcohol or other drugs, excess shopping, sex, gambling, drugs, or find ways to fill our lives with constant activity of one kind or another—and this is certainly not an exhaustive list. These things cannot really sustain us, physically, emotionally or spiritually, they are but temporary and poor substitutes, they are not the true bread of life. For Christians, it is Jesus who can fill our spiritual hunger and nourish our souls. “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” Jesus told the ones whom John calls ‘the Jews’. Now, it’s important to remember that when John wrote his gospel for his community of believers, eight or nine decades after Jesus’ death<sup>1</sup>, this was a community who by that time felt themselves apart from mainstream Judaism. So when John writes about ‘the Jews’ we can interpret that to mean the Jewish leaders and authorities who were in opposition to Jesus and his teachings and his followers.

Jesus told the people that he is the **true** bread that came down from heaven, he was telling his Jewish audience that he was sent by God to feed them—to save them -- just as God had sent their ancestors manna, —the bread of heaven -- to save them from starving while crossing the desert to the promised land. According to the prophets, and his Jewish listeners would certainly have known this, the Messiah was expected to reproduce the miracle of the giving of manna. And that was the miracle of the loaves and fishes, for those who had eyes to see, hearts to believe and minds to understand what had happened in their very midst.

Even trying to explain it this way, many didn’t understand, or didn’t want to believe he could be the Messiah, the person who God sent to save them. They couldn’t wrap their heads around it, or make the connection. Jesus, bread from heaven. Humpf! There was much grumbling and complaining about that statement John tells us. Lots of folk refused to make that leap of faith. Many couldn’t get past how the son of Joseph the carpenter and his wife Mary, from the community they knew, could really be sent from God—never mind be to them like the manna that saved their ancestors from certain death in the desert. I can appreciate that this would take a bit of a leap. Can you just imagine if the son of your neighbour—the kid you saw grow up from childhood, maybe even went to school with, or who just lived down the street or across town declares himself to be sent to you by God? It’s a big enough leap when someone you knew before they went to seminary becomes a clergy person. But to declare themselves as the one come from God, who can bring you nourishment to feed your eternal soul? I’m sure it would be the talk of the town, with much head shaking and tongue wagging. And how does Jesus response to that? Verses 43-44:

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<sup>1</sup> The New Oxford Annotated Bible, (Oxford University Press:Oxford/New York 2001) 147 New Testament

<sup>43</sup> “Stop grumbling among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me; and I will raise them to life on the last day. <sup>45</sup> The prophets wrote, ‘Everyone will be taught by God.’ Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me. (GNT)

It’s like Jesus is telling them to get over themselves, this is not of their doing, whether they believe who he is or not, God is at work here.

We are drawn by God, to come to God. God in Christ wants nothing more than to be in relationship with us! Holy Spirit prods us, works away at us, niggling here and there, trying to break down those head strong, logic-based walls that we put up against surrendering ourselves to Jesus the Christ, to his teachings, to believing that Christ’s way is the way. It takes a leap of faith to do that, to let go and let God, and a leap of faith doesn’t come from the logical side of our brain! It can be hard to let go of our very rational way of thinking—after all that’s how our society has trained us to be. Jesus’ ways were counter-cultural in his day, and still are today! The ways Jesus teaches are not the ways of society, especially in a ‘me-first’ dollar oriented culture like ours—a society that tells us that our goodness and value as people is equivalent to our buying power. Amongst all the messages our culture bombards us with, it can be hard to hear the call of God, to feel Holy Spirit’s niggles, to see how Jesus can be the bread of heaven for us.

The bread of heaven. The manna in the desert was truly miraculous and an amazing wonder that God provided God’s people taking them through their desert crossing –“a true life saver.”<sup>2</sup> The manna was, for all its wonder and delight and miraculous properties, a short term fix. It signaled the presence of God among (God’s) people.<sup>3</sup> Once they reached the Promised Land, however, the manna stopped coming.

Jesus, the true and living bread from heaven. Jesus did more than signal God’s presence among God’s people. Jesus walked among them, Jesus was God incarnate, God walking among them, God’s living presence among the people, calling God’s people back to God. Jesus really is the bread of life. Jesus nourishes and feeds us always; filling that hunger we have for a connection with our Creator. Kind of like a bread box that’s always full, a bread box that will never be empty!

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<sup>2</sup> Scott Hoezee. His commentary on John 6: 35,41-51 “The Lectionary Gospel”: [http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-14b/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_gospel](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-14b/?type=the_lectionary_gospel) accessed August 4/15

<sup>3</sup> Ibid