

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
 Jesus said "I am the bread of life".  
 So what is feeding your soul?  
 Scripture: John 6:35-59  
 Rev. Steve Filyk  
 February 13, 2022  
 Opening Hymn: Break now the bread of life  
 Choruses: Jesus name above all names, Jesus Messiah  
 Closing Hymn: My hope is built on nothing less  
 Sunday before Valentine's Day

I grew up on bread.

Not package and sliced wonder-bread,  
 But fresh from the oven brown bread.  
 My mom would make six loaves at a time.

When mom was baking  
 we would wait expectantly.

Even before the loaves had fully cooled  
 We would tear them from the pans,  
 Cut the bread into thick slices,  
 And slather the slices with butter and jam.

We would devour entire loaves at a time.  
 There was nothing better!

Bread is called the 'staff of life',  
 That is a staple of human existence.

It has been enjoyed across cultures  
 throughout human history.

"Evidence was found of baked bread  
 at a northeastern Jordan [archeological site]  
 from [over 14000] years ago.

The researchers... were excavating stone fireplaces  
 when they came upon the ancient crumbs.

They believe the Natufians, an Eastern Mediterranean  
 hunter-gatherer people, were baking bread 4,000 years  
 before farming became a way of life."<sup>i</sup>

"The ancient Greeks were already producing  
 more than 80 types of bread in 2500 B.C.

Bread was so important to the Egyptian way of life  
 that it was used as a type of currency...  
 they would often place it  
 in the tombs of their dead.

Bakers were powerful credit brokers  
 during the Middle Ages in France.  
 They often loaned out bread as currency and as a form of credit."<sup>ii</sup>

In today's lesson, Jesus talks to us about bread.

Jesus tells us: "I am the bread of life."

Now those who are a little more familiar

With the Gospel of John

Will know that this is the first of Jesus'  
Predicated 'I am' statements.

"There are two kinds of I AM statements in John:  
absolute and predicated.

The absolute statements refer to Jesus  
adopting God's own self-designation  
in the Old Testament...

[Like], when Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I AM"...

The predicated statements refer to the construction  
I AM + a predicate noun.

There are seven of these in John:

- I am the bread of life (6:35, 41, 48, 51)
- I am the light of the world (8:12; 9:5)
- I am the gate of the sheepfold (10:7, 9)
- I am the good shepherd (10:11, 14)
- I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
- I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
- I am the true vine (15:1, 5)<sup>iii</sup>

Today Jesus speaks the first of these predicated 'I am' statements.

Jesus tells us: "I am the bread of life."

This is all-the-more interesting

When you realise that Jesus

Had recently performed a miracle  
Of feeding a group of 5000 people.

When Jesus travelled to the east side of the Sea of Galilee,

The people had followed him,

But hadn't bothered to take provisions.

Realising that they were hungry,

He gathered a few scant offerings,

[two small fish and five small barley loves]

Said a prayer and had them distributed to the people.

And what was experienced was another miracle

Of incredible abundance.

As the food was shared, everyone was fed.

The meals started out with two small fish

And five barley loves

But with Jesus' presence and God's blessing  
 They ended up with full stomachs  
 And 12 baskets of leftovers.

Some kids were not happy having fish sandwiches  
 For lunch the following week...

At this point Jesus returns to the other side of the lake  
 Back to Capernaum.

When the people who had been fed  
 Realised he was now gone,  
 They went out searching for him again.

In the verses that precede our reading  
 Jesus chides them for coming after him  
 Just to get more food and leftovers.

He tells them that they are missing out  
 On something more important:

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me  
 will never go hungry,  
 and whoever believes in me  
 will never be thirsty."<sup>iv</sup>

"I am the bread of life." Jesus says.  
 "I am the bread that came down from heaven." He continues.

Like those other conversations of Jesus'  
 That we've been studying  
 Jesus words cause confusion.

When Jesus speaks of bread or water or being born again,  
 The people think he is speaking on the literal level.

When Jesus says that he is the bread  
 that came down from heaven,  
 They aren't seeing his Old Testament reference  
 To how God fed the people of Israel  
 in the wilderness.

No, they are 'grumbling'  
 Like those wilderness escapees.

They ask themselves:  
 "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph,  
 whose father and mother we know?  
 How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"<sup>v</sup>

When Jesus tells them  
 "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."

They begin to arguing:  
 "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"<sup>vi</sup>

They are thinking that Jesus, a pious Jew  
 Is suggesting cannibalism.

But this is NOT what Jesus is saying.  
 Jesus is using a form of argument  
 That was common among the ancients.

[the Ancients believed that] all things  
 [could] be understood on four levels:  
 the literal, the metaphoric... the [ethical].

And ultimately, the mystical  
 or sometimes called the "anagogical" level.

It's hard to get to those levels  
 unless you go through the literal.

Dante says you can't understand the three deeper levels  
 unless you first understand the literal level...<sup>vii</sup>

That's why Jesus first performed that miraculous feeding.

In order to speak about what sustains our spirits  
 He first demonstrates what feeds our stomachs.

He talks about bread,  
 That symbol of nourishment  
 As an entryway to talking about life  
 That is full and lasting.

And what Jesus tells us is this:

If you want life that is full and lasting  
 You have to take hold of him,  
 ingest him, consume him,  
 And let him literally become part of you.

Just as you did this with your morning toast  
 You need to do with him today.

Only when you make Jesus part of your daily routine,  
 will you find that life that is full and lasting.  
 Only Jesus can meet our deepest hunger  
 And quench our greatest thirst.

It won't come through another purchase on Amazon.  
 It won't come through a reconciled relationship.  
 It won't come through a promotion.  
 It won't come through buying a bigger house.

In his book *Pensees*  
 French 17th-century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal  
 Makes the following observation:

"All men seek happiness.  
 There are no exceptions.

However different the means they may employ,  
 they all strive towards this goal.

The reason why some go to war  
 and some do not  
 is the same desire in both  
 [with just a variation in approach]...

[Happiness] is the motive of every act of every man,  
 including those who go and hang themselves.

Yet for very many years  
 no one without faith  
 has ever reached the goal  
 at which everyone is continually aiming...

A test which has gone on so long,  
 without pause or change,  
 really ought to convince us  
 that we are incapable of attaining the good  
 by our own efforts.

But example teaches us very little.

No two examples are so exactly alike  
 that there is not some subtle difference,  
 and that is what makes us expect

that our expectations  
 will not be disappointed this time  
 as they were last time.

So, while the present never satisfies us,  
 experience deceives us,

and leads us on from one misfortune  
to another until death comes  
as the ultimate and eternal climax.

What else does this craving,  
and this helplessness, proclaim  
but that there was once in man a true happiness,

of which all that now remains  
is the empty print and trace?

This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him...  
though none can help,  
since this infinite abyss  
can be filled only

with an infinite and immutable object;  
in other words by God himself.<sup>iviii</sup>

The human problem that Pascal is speaking about  
Is maybe best stated by the Rolling Stones:  
"I can't get no satisfaction..."

What Pascal proposes (opposed to Jagger)  
It that only Jesus is capable of filling  
That empty space, that infinite abyss  
In our heart.

It is interesting to note that the response to Jesus' offer  
Isn't that he picks up more disciples,  
But that he loses many.

They are confused. They don't understand him.  
And maybe just maybe they can't believe  
That this sort of life  
could actually be available.

Are you hungry for the life Jesus offers?  
Come, taste and see the Lord is good!  
Amen.

<sup>i</sup> "Completely Random Facts About Bread - Knowledge Stew." Knowledge Stew, 1 Oct. 2021, [knowledgestew.com/random-facts-bread](http://knowledgestew.com/random-facts-bread).

<sup>ii</sup> "10 Fun Facts About Bread Through the Ages - Dimpflmeier Bakery." Dimpflmeier Bakery, 14 Jan. 2015, [www.dimpflmeierbakery.com/fun-facts-about-bread](http://www.dimpflmeierbakery.com/fun-facts-about-bread).

<sup>iii</sup> "Commentary on John 6:35-59 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary." Working Preacher from Luther Seminary, 8 Feb. 2022, [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/bread-of-life/commentary-on-john-635-59-2](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/bread-of-life/commentary-on-john-635-59-2).

<sup>iv</sup> John 6:35 NIV

<sup>v</sup> John 6:42 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> John 6:51-52 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> Reinhart, Peter. "The art and craft of bread." 14 Jan. 2009, [www.ted.com/talks/peter\\_reinhart\\_the\\_art\\_and\\_craft\\_of\\_bread?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/peter_reinhart_the_art_and_craft_of_bread?language=en).

<sup>viii</sup> Blaise Pascal in *Pensees* "Pascal's God-Shaped Hole - The Harvard Ichthus." *Harvard Ichthus*, 16 Sept. 2015, [harvardichthus.org/2011/05/pascal\\_hole](http://harvardichthus.org/2011/05/pascal_hole).