

John 6:35, 40-50

³⁵Jesus 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.

⁴⁰This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

The past three weeks, the gospel readings have been bread ad infinitum. By this time, we are up to our eyeballs in bread. But the words of Jesus started the whole thing when he had a huge crowd in front of him, 5000 in all, and he said to his disciples, “where can we get enough bread to feed them all?” He said it to get them to see that He is actually the bread and the heavenly father has sent him as the gift to save them and give them life. The whole metaphorical bread thing is lost on them. They don’t see him as the one sent from God. But, instead the people think Jesus is just feeding them, so they try to make their leader so that he can continue to feed them. So, Jesus flees from them.

Then last week, we read that the crowd finds him. He tries to explain to them what he was trying to teach within his miracle. So, he starts talking about bread again. “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal... “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus says this, but they really don’t get it.

So today, Jesus says to the crowd, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...you have seen me and yet do not

believe.” And the people who hear Jesus still don’t get it. But then, maybe we rarely get it either. Are we still trying to chase Jesus for what he will give us to provide for our needs?

We have needs, but what we have to realize is that our needs are the means through which God approaches us. In the time of Christ, there were many around him who had no more obvious need than the need for daily bread. In fact there still are today. As Gandhi noticed in his homeland of India, “There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.” This is why Jesus tried to help them make sense of their existence and his presence with them by talking about bread. Jesus might say to us today, “I am the portfolio of life” for those who are ready to retire but lost too much in the stock market to retire now. Or I am the “vocation” of life for those whose bread is trying to find what they want to do with their life. When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life”, he is preaching a sermon to all those anxious people who are wringing their hands ready to quit struggling.

But Jesus apparently doesn’t really want us to quit struggling with our concerns altogether. After all, Jesus does not continue to feed the people. Instead, Jesus wants to become more important in himself than whatever our greatest struggle is. Whatever your greatest care is, Jesus should really be it.

I don’t know how many of you have seen Lord of the Rings. In these movies, the main characters are two Hobbits, Frodo and Sam. Frodo and Sam are traveling with a ring to destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom. The journey to Mount Doom is long, dangerous, and tiring. The Hobbits take something called Lembas bread along with them. Lembas bread has amazing powers to both sustain travelers and even bring healing to the wounded or sick. One piece of Lembas was enough to last a traveler a full day.

The Lembas bread however did not satisfy desire to eat or make them feel less hungry. At times Sam’s mind was filled with the memories of food, and the longing for simple bread and meats. It had also had a characteristic without which the Hobbits would have long ago lain down to die. It “had a potency that increased as travelers relied on it alone and did not mingle it with other foods. *It fed the will, and it gave strength to endure, and to master sinew and limb beyond the measure of mortal kind.*”¹

Doesn’t that sound like Jesus as the “bread of life”? Our ability to receive strength in Jesus along the journey depends on our faithfulness in trusting only Jesus along the way. Wherever we insist on placing our attention on our worries and cares, Jesus will seem far away.

Think of whatever is stressing you out at the moment. It would sound strange for Jesus to show up to us today and start talking to us in metaphor wouldn’t it? I am the “mortgage payment of life” or “I am clear bill of health of life”. Following Jesus does not guarantee payment of our mortgage, does not keep us from getting sick, and does not fix all of our problems. But if all of

¹ Scott Hoezee.

our focus is on our problems, we miss seeing how Jesus can and will feed and sustain us through all of life's journey.

It is easy to focus on our problems. And when we focus on our problems, they really seem to grow, don't they? Take our church, for example. Meeting the budget has always been a constant concern and cause for stress. "Growing" the church, building our numbers, and especially lowering the average age of our members, has been a focus for many years. Today we welcome three new members into the congregation. It is certainly cause for celebration, but not because it addresses the problems we have identified of finances and membership, but rather because these three are responding to God's call to discipleship by uniting with and joining in the ministry of this particular congregation.

If we identify as our primary focus bringing in new members and increasing giving to the church, we will continue to be focused on the problems – on the particular hungers of the day, rather than focusing on Jesus, the head of this body of Christ who gathers us together for ministry. Rather, as individuals and as a congregation we need to ask ourselves how we will do ministry with Jesus at the center.

There are people all around us who are hungering for their daily bread. Some have hungry stomachs, but many have hungry hearts, hungry souls, and hungry spirits. Just as Jesus gathered the hungry together, so we must issue the invitation to the hungry in our midst. Just as Jesus met their temporary hungers, so in our ministry we will be called to meet the hungers of the world. But at the same time, we need to be focused on the bread from heaven, the bread that can sustain us through all of life's trials and tribulations, through feast and famine – and that is Jesus Christ. Just as we are called to share from what God has given us in order to help feed others, we are also called to share the love and grace of Jesus Christ with all we meet.

We have many prayers for the ministry of this church. Certainly we would like to not only see our budget met, but increased to give more to missions. Certainly we would like to see our numbers grow, and especially to help nurture more children, youth, and younger adults. But more than anything, our prayer is for this church to be focused on the true bread, on Jesus Christ, and to understand the mission and ministry to which we are called through the one who sends us out, as bread in the world.