

**Sermon for 8-5-2018**  
**Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; John 6:24-35**  
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Yesterday, Jesus fed five thousand people. Yesterday, Jesus fed five thousand hungry people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Yesterday, the Good Shepherd fed his sheep, and they were satisfied.

But today is a new day, and when the people who camped out on the mountain overnight wake up, they look around for that Good Shepherd and realize that he's moved along. Jesus and his disciples have gone down to Capernaum -- they've got work to do -- and those people, those hungry sheep, set out to track him down.

Yesterday, they were satisfied; but today, they're hungry, they're searching again.

And when they reach Jesus, he knows exactly why they've followed him: "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill..."<sup>i</sup> It's that feeling of being filled with goodness, well nourished, satisfied and perfectly content. That's what the people are chasing.

It's not like the overstuffed feeling that I have at the end of Thanksgiving dinner every year, when I'm wallowing in extreme discomfort and promising myself that I won't overeat next year, I won't!... and it's also not like the feeling after wolfing down a meal on the go during a rushed day, maybe fast food or an enormous coffee and a candy bar (you're full, but not of good things).

This feeling the people are chasing, the reason they've come to find Jesus, is healthy satisfaction, blessed contentment; it's being filled in body, mind, and spirit. It's what they felt yesterday, and they want to feel it again today.

Jesus understands, of course, but he does not give them what they want, what they think they need. The meal they shared on the mountain, the abundant barley loaves and fish, was amazing and miraculous and *real* -- they held that bread in their hands, and tasted that fish on their tongues -- but Jesus will not be doing that over and over again (although the people would certainly like him to)!

In the verses to come, Jesus challenges the people to expand their understanding, and deepen their knowledge, and strengthen their faith. It's a big ask, and he knows it. It's an *invitation* into deeper faith, and intimacy with God, and salvation. An invitation to a more meaningful life!

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life...."<sup>ii</sup>

The food that endures -- a more literal translation of the Greek verb, *menei*, would be "the food that remains into eternal life."<sup>iii</sup> Food that endures, that remains, food that lasts forever; not a Twinkie, or some other shrink-wrapped preservative-filled sugary treat, but food that nourishes our souls, that satisfies us in mind, body, and spirit, food that sustains us.

It's as if Jesus is saying, "Go deeper. The miracle yesterday was great, and the meal was delicious, but there is so much more to know and experience... more truth, more nourishment, more of this sacred journey... Go deeper; keep moving closer and closer to the heart of God."

Well, understandably, the people don't quite grasp what Jesus is saying. They want to understand, of course, so they question Jesus, and they refer to one of the great defining stories of their identity as God's chosen people -- the Exodus story, the manna in the wilderness.<sup>iv</sup>

*"What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*<sup>v</sup>

It's ironic, isn't it, that they ask him for a sign **the day after** the feeding of the five thousand? But Jesus doesn't seem to mind. Instead, he engages with the Exodus story, he uses it and plays with it in order to gently move the people toward a deeper understanding.

*"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."<sup>vi</sup>*

Do you see what Jesus does there, the little switcheroo? The people already know that the manna in the wilderness came from God, not from Moses. That's not surprising. It's the change in verb tenses that stands out: "it was not Moses who **gave** you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who **gives** you the true bread from heaven." Jesus is telling the people that this story of the past, of God raining down bread from heaven to sustain their ancestors in the desert, doesn't have to stay in the past. Manna from heaven, holy food that nourishes the soul, is still raining down for God's people every day.<sup>vii</sup>

With every word, with every step, Jesus is pushing gently. He is opening minds and broadening horizons. He's inviting the people into a deep, dynamic, evolving relationship with God -- a relationship that's not based entirely on the past, a relationship that isn't focused on signs and miracles. And here, in verse 33, is the crux: "The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

*The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*

What is the bread of God? Jesus lays it out for us. The bread of God:

- 1) **comes down from heaven** -- its origins are in God's eternal dwelling place, the sacred dimension, the seat of all holiness, the place where angels sing and souls find their rest;
- 2) **and gives life** -- it engenders breath, vitality, movement, wholeness, dignity, love, and abundance;

3) **to the world** -- not just to me and you, not just the five thousand, but to the whole world.

That's the bread of God. Holy, and life-giving, and readily available to all.

And when Jesus says "***I am the bread of life***," he's revealing his truest identity as Emmanuel, the Messiah, the one who **comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**<sup>viii</sup> He is the personification, the embodiment, the incarnation of that "food that endures for eternal life."

***"I am the bread of life."*** These words are an invitation. A holy invitation from our Lord and Savior, an invitation extended to all who listen, the likes of which we will never encounter anywhere else... 'Get to know me better. Walk beside me. Learn from me. Push yourselves to go deeper, to look beyond the surface, to trust me fully and completely... and you will find a new way of living. You won't ask for signs and marvels anymore, because you'll taste and feel and know the truth with every fiber of your being. You'll discover new blessings every day, you'll be nourished and strengthened and renewed, and nothing will ever be the same.'

Friends, we've been invited. Jesus has extended his holy invitation to each one of us; he's asked us to join him on a lifelong journey, to come to him again and again and feast at the never-ending soul banquet of faith and discipleship. No regrets, no looking back; just the promise of new life and perfect food for our souls, food that endures when everything else falls away. May we have the strength and courage to say yes, always yes, to the One who offers us all of himself -- the bread of true life. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> John 6:26 NRSV

<sup>ii</sup> vs. 27

<sup>iii</sup> from "Bread: SALT's Lectionary Commentary for Eleventh Week after Pentecost"

<sup>iv</sup> from *Working Preacher* Commentary on John 6:24-35 by Susan Hulen

<sup>v</sup> vs. 30-31

<sup>vi</sup> vs. 32

<sup>vii</sup> from S. Hulen

<sup>viii</sup> vs. 35