

Living Bread

[Read John 6:51-58]

⁵¹I am the *living bread* that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” ⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

Fast Food Society

For just a moment, think about your favorite fast food. Is it a Wendy’s Single, or a Burrito Supreme from Taco Bell? Is it the classic Big Mac from McDonald’s or Krispy Kreme Donuts?

The thing about fast food is it’s quick, it’s easy, it’s cheap—and it makes you feel good for a moment. But does it really *feed* you? Maybe you’ve heard of a documentary film called “Supersize Me,” about a man named Morgan Spurlock who ate nothing but fast food for a 30-day period. He gained 25 pounds, lost muscle mass, went through severe depression, and developed heart problems and high cholesterol.¹

Spiritual Food

I’ve been talking about physical food, but do we ever stop to consider how we are being fed and shaped spiritually? Jesus offers “living bread.” But

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_Size_Me

in today's *fast food* society, we are fed and shaped by a consumer driven market that offers all kinds of "DEAD bread".

Empty and Full Church Cartoon

Recently, I saw a cartoon with 2 frames. In the first frame was a church with a sign outside that read, "Come and hear God's word." That church was empty! In the second frame was a church with a sign outside that read, "Come and hear what you want to hear." That church was full!

Think about that for a moment. Our culture tells us what we want to hear. Our culture tells us that it is all about us and making us happy. We're told that the way to be happy is to acquire—buy, possess, own—the newest, the latest, the biggest, the best. That's what will make you happy. But that's nothing more than a consumer-driven, fast food thinking culture that tells you what you want to hear. It makes you feel good for a moment, but in the end it's "Dead bread."

False gods

We have all kinds of dead bread in our world today offered by all kinds of false gods. Power, wealth, material goods, and the allure of sexual objects are false manna from false gods. We think that if we acquire these things that they will bring us salvation, make us happy, and fulfill our lives. Our society markets these false "breads of life" to us and we are more than willing to buy into them.

Shaped by false gods

We are shaped by the false gods of consumerism and hedonism. Happiness shaped by hedonism is defined by what feels good. Happiness shaped by consumerism is all about us at the expense of others.

We feed our false gods with time and money. And what do they give us in return? They give us *dead bread* that leads to a spiritual death. We might feel good for a moment but in the end, we come away empty and look for something else to fill the void.

We are lured from one false god to the next by the hope that the next type of false manna will be fulfilling. When we give our time and money to these false gods we ascribe worth to these false gods. When we ascribe worth to these gods, we are worshipping these gods. So where do we go to find living bread?

Living Bread

Listen again to the first line of today's Scripture. Jesus says, "I am the *living bread* that came down from heaven." This one sentence tells us a lot about Jesus.

First

The first part of the sentence contains the phrase, "I am." By using this phrase Jesus is telling the crowd that he is one with God the Father. When Moses encounters God on the mountaintop in the form of a burning

bush he asks God what name he should call God. God replies by saying, "I am."

Jesus is clearly identifying himself as the Son of God by saying, "I am." We come to know God and have a relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of his only son, Jesus, the Christ.

Second

The second part of the sentence says, "the living bread that came down from heaven." Jesus tells the people that all their needs will be met through him by saying he is the living bread.

Poor and hungry

What does he mean when he says he is the living bread? Most of the people following Jesus are poor and do not know where their next meal will come from. Bread was the food of the masses. We cannot imagine their physical hunger for bread.

The poor and hungry follow Jesus because he miraculously fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fishes. Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (John 6:26). The people following Jesus are focused on their immediate desires being fulfilled at the expense of their spiritual and eternal life.

People grumble

Jesus tells the people to work for the food that will give them eternal life. The people ask Jesus what they must do to get this special food. Jesus tells them that they must believe in him. The people grumble and ask Jesus for a sign. They do not believe that Jesus came from heaven. They're 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"' (John 6:42)?

Moses gave us manna

The crowd of followers ask for manna from heaven like Moses gave their ancestors. Jesus tells them it was not Moses but God the Father who provided manna from heaven. Besides that, the manna they are seeking does not give eternal life. Jesus tells them, "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:58).

Jesus is the Word

God knows what we need better than we do. God is not like that church in the cartoon that says, "Come hear what you want to hear." God knows what we need because God is our creator. We are God's creatures. God loves us and takes the initiative to feed us. We are fed by God through the sacrament of Word and Table. Sacrament means gift. We receive the gift of grace through God's word and Holy Communion.

Lord's Supper

One of the most important commands given by Jesus to his disciples is to eat the Lord's Supper. John's Gospel does not have the story relating the Lord's Supper like the ones we have in Mathew, Mark, and Luke but Jesus does mention receiving Holy Communion in John's Gospel.

Gospel of John's Last Supper

Jesus tells the crowd they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have eternal life. Jesus teaches the crowd saying, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (John 6:54-56). We receive the love and grace of Jesus and the promise of eternal life when we receive Holy Communion. This is a great mystery. How does Holy Communion transform us?

Relating the story in today's world

Holy Communion transforms us in many ways that are different from the dead bread we pursue in the world. Let me give you a little illustration. A poll was conducted by the Barna Group asking the question, "What is your favorite phrase that you like to hear?" There were three different answers.

Number One Response-I Love You

The number one response was, "I love you." All of us need to be loved. We were created in the image of God to be loved by God and one

another. The world loves us conditionally, but God loves us unconditionally. We are loved and valued by the world if we are physically beautiful, powerful, rich, or famous. God on the other hand loves us for who we are.

When Jesus shared the Passover meal with his closest followers he held up the loaf of bread and said, "Take, eat, this is *my body* which is broken for you do this in remembrance of me." By saying this, Jesus was substituting his body in the place of the Passover Lamb as a sacrifice for us. God loves us so much that God is willing to die for us. We are loved unconditionally by God not for what we do but for who we belong to.

Number Two Response-You Are Forgiven

The number two response from the survey was, "You are forgiven." All of us are sinners and need to be forgiven. The world teaches us to seek revenge and to get even but God teaches us to forgive.

Again, at the Last Supper when the meal was over he [Jesus] held up the cup and said, "Drink from this all of you. This is the cup of the new covenant filled with *my blood*, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." When Jesus died on the cross for our sins he was telling all of us that we are forgiven.

Number Three Response-Dinner is Ready

Before we get to the number three response let's review the first two responses. Response number one was, "I love you." Response number two

was, "You are forgiven." These are very heavy words. What do you think the number three response was? The number three response was, "Dinner is ready."

There is a lot of hunger in the world today, not just physical hunger but emotional and spiritual hunger as well. The world teaches us to feed ourselves on *dead bread*, but God teaches us to feed on the *living bread*.

When we come forward to receive Holy Communion we cup our hands together to receive the *living bread* from the pastor. We all receive the same gift of *living bread*. In that moment, God provides all that we need, nothing more and nothing less. When Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Holy Communion it was the great mystery of God to provide us food for our spiritual journey.

Holy Communion is a mystery

Holy Communion is a great mystery that requires faith to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. What we receive during Holy Communion depends upon how we look at Jesus Christ. If we look at Jesus as just another prophet, an historical figure but not much else then we see Holy Communion as just a memorial service for Jesus. What we receive from a memorial service is "*Dead-bread*."

If we look at Jesus as being absent until he returns to earth, then what we receive is "*One day soon bread*". But if we want to receive the "*Living*

bread” of Christ, then what we need to believe is that Jesus is present among us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not say I am the “*Dead Bread.*” And he did not say I am the “*One Day Soon Bread.*” He said I am the “*Living Bread.*” A bread that starts changing us. Right here and right now!

We are changed

When we are changed by the *living bread*, we experience the love of Christ. We know that we are loved unconditionally.

When we are changed by the *living bread*, our sins are washed away. We know that we are forgiven, and we learn to forgive others.

Finally, when we are changed by the *living bread* we are filled with the grace of God. Grace enables us to have faith. Grace enables us to obey the teachings of Jesus. Grace enables us to have the heart and mind of Christ.

Jesus is the living bread that enters into our hearts, changes us, changes who we are. By receiving Holy Communion, we are saying, “Thank you Jesus for coming down from heaven to bring us the living bread of eternal life.”

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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Jesus is the Word

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). When Jesus tells the people that they must believe in him, he means that they must obey his teachings. Jesus tells the crowd, "It 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" (John 6:45).

Image of Holy Communion

A good friend of mine named John has two boys ages 9 and 11. Their names are Mark and Luke. Mark and Luke share a room together and sleep in bunk beds. They spend a lot of time together even though they have different personalities, needs, and desires. They are typical boys that get along some of the time and disagree at other times over anything and everything.

I met John, their dad, at Duke Seminary in a class called Methodism. Methodism is primarily about the history of the Methodist movement started by John Wesley. Wesley knew from Scripture that the only way to transform his life and the lives of others was through the grace of Jesus Christ. How do we get this grace? Wesley identified several ways, but one of the most important was through communion.

Wesley believed in a living presence of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. He believed that when we take the bread and juice by our physical mouths, we also receive, by the power of the Holy Spirit, an infusion of Christ's love through our "mouths of faith." Because he believed that he--- and we---directly receive Christ's grace during communion. Wesley personally received communion at least 3 times a week his entire life. In his mind, every infusion of grace would make a difference in one's spiritual journey.

Neither John nor I had experienced receiving Holy Communion on a weekly basis before seminary. We were a little skeptical about Wesley's claims. John began an experiment with his own sons to test John Wesley's claims. He began taking his wife and sons to Duke Chapel every Sunday. The worship service would begin at 11AM and end 12 noon. Communion was offered weekly in a smaller chapel after the worship service but it took an extra 30 minutes. John taught his sons that when they received communion, they would also receive---by the power of the Holy Spirit---the grace and love of Christ in their hearts. This grace and love would fill up their hearts so that they would have Christ's love to sustain them. John was curious, though, how long his sons would tolerate giving up the extra 30 minutes required for communion.

After they began receiving communion weekly, John began to notice a difference in his sons' behavior. When the family received communion the

two boys would get along with each other better and have better weeks at school and at home. When the family did not receive communion because of a conflict in their schedule, the two boys would be more irritable towards each other and at school.

One time, they missed communion for three weeks, because of his younger son's participation in cub scouts on Sundays. The next week, before church, his oldest son came to John. "Are we going to stay for communion, Dad?"

John thought, "Oh, oh. Here it comes. They don't want to go anymore." Instead, his oldest son said, "I want to stay for communion. My life has just not been going right. I get along better with Luke and do better with school when we have communion." John called me and told me about his sons wanting to stay in church to receive communion. Wesley was right about grace being conferred through Holy Communion. It made both John and I believers.

Hungry for Holy Communion

By now I hope you're hungry for Holy Communion, and you're thinking, 'When can I receive it? You can receive it THIS WEEK if you come to our Oasis service on Wednesday at 5:30. And the other way to receive Holy Communion is to attend any of our three services on the first Sunday of every month when we do our monthly communion.'

Good News

So, hear the good news. Jesus is the *living bread* that is far superior to the dead bread of the world. The *living bread* is the love of Christ that lives and works inside you and me.

In other words, as John Wesley, the founder of Methodism said, "We receive the physical bread by our physical mouths, but we also receive the grace and love of Christ, the living part of Christ that surrounds the physical bread. That grace and love of Christ comes inside us, opens our hearts to God's presence, and changes us."

Response

Our response to reading the word of God in Scripture is to become aware that we are sinners, repent of our sins, have faith in Jesus to forgive our sins, and believe we are forgiven through the blood of Christ given on the cross. If we have faith and believe then we will obey Jesus and have eternal life.