

“I Am The Bread of Life”

A Sermon Preached at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO
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Proper 13 Year B - RCL
John 6:24-35

Well hello St. Barnabas! Grace and peace to you this morning. I am at once pleased and privileged to be among you this morning as we come together to worship a common Christ.

As we have just heard, the reading from God’s Word that guides our thoughts today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 24-35.

The first thing I’d like to do is speak to the context of this reading. This context will not only explain what is going on in this reading, but also give us a glimpse into what happened immediately prior. With this wider perspective we can more fully understand the day’s events.

So today’s reading talks about a crowd of people that had been with Jesus the day before. Leading up to the sixth chapter of John we find Jesus performing a number of miracles. We read that on the **far** side of the Sea of Galilee in some remote area...there Jesus had been teaching and preaching and performing miracles. Again, we know from an earlier account

in this 6th chapter of John that Jesus had already performed a miracle by feeding 5000 with five loaves and two fish.

Now if we're really paying attention, today's reading is rich in its deeper meanings. Yes, the crowds were fascinated by the things that Jesus had done but according to Jesus himself...for the wrong reasons.

They had heard of, and some had actually seen the feeding of the 5000 as well as other miracles. They liked this miracle and they wanted Jesus to do it again. If their only focus was "gimme more bread" they missed the point.

Many of us are guilty of this today...we miss the point. Like the people in the crowd at Capernum, we focus on the **product** of the miracle instead of the **person** of the miracle.

Jesus did indeed give bread but again, we miss the whole point if we think that's all He came to do. That's **not** the main reason He came. Some of us have missed a lot of bread in our lives and still others of us have had bread taken out of our hands and mouths. But I hope it lands on all of us with abundant good news that Jesus did not come to just give bread...He came to **be** bread. The irony is that sometimes the bread has to be taken away from us so that we can come to trust Jesus as the bread. One of my most cherished memories of my mother has to do with my amazement at how she fed us sometimes. I have eight siblings and there were times when we didn't have much. There were many times when our mother went hungry so that we might eat. Once in a while my mother would pile us all in the

car and we'd drive to the beach. We lived on Long Island so the beach was only a few minutes away. When we arrived we would park so that we had a view of the ocean. Once we settled in my mother would give us each 1 or 2 crackers and then pull out a Tupperware bowl. You see my mother had taken a small can of tuna and mixed it up with Miracle Whip, chopped egg and relish. She fed all of us from that one small can of tuna. I'll never forget how happy we were. It wasn't so much that we were getting a lot to eat because we weren't.

It was the fact that our mother had so lovingly provided this opportunity for us to all be together and we were grateful for 1 or 2 crackers with that tuna. We were all participating in our little feast. A few years ago, as I placed her lunch before her, a tuna sandwich, Doris would say to me, "*Shug, tuna is not a soup.*" For all these years I had been making that same soupy tuna that my mother had made out of necessity so that we could all have some. To this day I am in awe of the miracle of the tuna.

You know, some things are worth complaining to God about. Soupy tuna isn't one of them. But sometimes God gets a little annoyed with us. I think we see this today when Jesus mildly rebukes the people. He said to 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), I do not think Jesus was scolding the crowd for seeking bread because they were hungry. But I do think Jesus was disappointed that the crowd did not expect more, not more bread...but **something** more.

Perhaps Jesus was thinking more about ending the peoples' hunger than the physical act of serving the bread. In other words, Jesus wasn't angry at them for being hungry but for failing to see Him as something more than a simple dispenser of bread.

Do any of us see ourselves in that crowd at Capernum? Are we looking for Him just because we've had our fill and we want it again, we want more? Are we guilty of just looking to Jesus for things like health, prosperity, and shelter? What about looking to Jesus as our savior? Our redeemer? How do we recognize our own spiritual hunger? I think maybe we can all see ourselves in that crowd.

Maybe we're not as blatant or single-focused...but do we really try to find out all that Jesus offers us? Do we really recognize the ways in which God is continually trying to feed us?

If we read today's scripture with a discerning heart and spirit, maybe our priorities and perceptions can be adjusted.

I must say though that I do sometimes contemplate this story in terms of the realities of the world we actually live in.

For those of us who are fortunate enough to eat every day, we should be mindful that eating your fill one day does not mean that you will not be hungry the next.

There are people among us who are hungry every day. They live each day not knowing where their next meal will come from. When there is no food, and you do not know how you will sustain your life today, what is the point of thinking about eternity? These things constantly upset my soul. Every hungry person is our responsibility. But I suppose that's a sermon for another day.

I read a story recently that made my soul feel a little better though and made me laugh bit as well. Now I don't suggest that it solves larger world issues but I think it made life a little better for the people involved.

It seems there was an airline flight being delayed and so the captain apologized and made an announcement. It was already quite late and this delay would mean many of the passengers would miss their connecting flights, dinner, appointments, and so on. There was much grumbling, whining and complaining.

One of the flight attendants decided to take the situation in hand and made an announcement. She said, *"We've got four empty baskets that we're going to pass to the back of the plane. We'll start at the front and as the basket*

passes you put whatever you may have that you're willing to share into the basket. Mints, candy, chips, cookies, whatever you're willing to share. If you don't have any food put your business card in or a book or magazine. Or maybe write a joke on a barf bag and put that in the basket. When the baskets get to the back we'll pass them forward and if you care to take something out, please do so.

This exercise went off without a hitch and the baskets were all filled. As the baskets moved forward people stopped grumbling and complaining and the mood on the plane improved greatly. People are fed in ways that had nothing to do with eating.

The passengers were actually in good spirits and seemed to forget about the delay. Eventually, the plane took off and landed safely at its destination albeit quite late. As the passengers deplaned a passenger stopped and spoke to the flight attendant whose idea this was and said, *"You know, there is a story in the Bible about what just happened."* The flight attendant looked at him, smiled and said, *"I know. That's why I did it."*

Oh that we could all call on our biblical teachings in times and situations like this.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In a few minutes we will come to this table to be fed. It is a perfect illustration of God trying to feed us in ways that give us life eternal. The miracle which we will witness and participate in this morning is not just the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but also the transformation of ourselves into the body of Christ by participating in this feast. But if we walk away simply saying “*I liked the bread today*” or “*Wasn't the wine good today?*” there is no miracle for us.

The miracle isn't in the feeding of this crowd, but in being a part of something much bigger than we are. God is always ready to feed us. Jesus comes not to give the bread but to **be** the bread. You cannot overeat at His table.

*Do not work for the perishing food, but the abiding food into life eternal, which the son of man gives to you, for him the God the Father sealed. **Amen***