“I Am The Bread of Life”

John 6:25-40(41-59)

Yeast, water, flour and heat. With these simple ingredients you can make simple bread. Nothing fancy, nothing that will win a culinary award, but a staple of living, of life, and perhaps the most basic type of food that a human can live on. As we delve into the “I am” statements of Jesus in the gospel of John we begin in John chapter 6, at the sea of Galilee, and bread is at the center of this unfolding narrative about who Jesus is, and what this means for his followers. In the first part of this chapter, Jesus’ miracles and message had brought thousands to the shore of the Sea of Galilee – as well as some nervous disciples. How to feed these people and how to pay for it, was front and center. Philip was struggling and said that eight months wages couldn’t provide a bite for each person in the crowd. Yet, over 5000 people were fed with five simple loaves of barley bread and two little fish. Jesus provided.

In John 6:10-11 it is recorded that Jesus took the bread and blessed it and distributed it to the people. From there everybody ate as much as they wanted. Then the baskets were gathered up and there were 12 of them, filled with left-overs. The people loved it, but they drew a rather human response. They thought here’s a guy who provides what we need, if he’s king we’re on easy street. Jesus retreated, and the crowd went searching for the man who just satisfied their hungry stomachs.

Everybody was hungry to figure it out, who is this Jesus and what does He mean to me? Maybe an endless supply of bread?

We live in an age and a place where our bread is both fancy and plentiful. There is nothing like going into a local restaurant and they bring a steaming roll with a container of butter, and the butter melts all over the rolls and even onto your fingers. It’s the best bread around. And if you’re really lucky, at the same place you can have more “bread” for dessert. A kind of amazing and sweet bread. If you go to the dessert counter they have cakes, torts, tarts and cupcakes. Made with the same basic ingredients; with leavening, flour, water, and heat, but also, just add a little sugar. Mixed together it all tastes so good.

But if we have so much to eat, such an endless supply of bread, then why is everybody’s soul so famished? Perhaps that’s because, like the people from John 6, we are looking for something other than Jesus to feed us. Something material – like free bread. We live in an age of consumption. If we can buy it we get it. If we can’t afford it we finance it. If we can’t buy it or finance it, we covet it. The problem is that nothing seems to satisfy the soul like Jesus. Buying stuff is great, but it always leaves us wanting more. Financing stuff creates financial dependency and that leads to even more hunger and desperation. And coveting has a way of hollowing out our soul and telling us that we never have enough and we will never be satisfied.

Into our souls reaches Jesus with these words, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” [John 6:35] While he speaks of hunger and thirst, to these starved masses in Galilee, it is not their stomachs that worry Jesus, it is their starved souls. Jesus speaks of his ability to satisfy in the following verses, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” [John 6:38-40].

For starving people, Jesus changes everything. Jesus, the bread of life, provides a deeper satisfaction than merely the cessation of physical need. In him we find a peace that truly satisfies. He is the one who came down from heaven. He is the one who takes away the gnawing hunger of life and provides us something grander. The will of Jesus’ Father is that mankind is saved through Jesus Christ. So the plan all along was for Jesus to come down from heaven and do what his Father asked of him. He took our sins into his human body. He took into himself the hunger, the thirst, the shame and the guilt of humanity. He took the brokenness that is so extreme and he had it nailed to the cross. Jesus suffered and died, once and for all, to save us. He is sufficient. He is enough and his sacrifice to save us and accomplish the will of his Father for us.

But why bread? Why not some crazy theological term? Why not something more esoteric or soul-searing? Simple…it’s simple…life in Jesus isn’t more complicated than bread. We don’t need frosted cupcakes to survive. We don’t need prime rib to make it. What we need is straight forward and simple…Jesus fills, he satisfies…he saves…he is our sufficiency and he fills us up.

The practical applications of this text are many. Some are for our heart and some more directly affect our behavior.

We will never be satisfied by consumption of more stuff. Jesus scolded the crowd for this very reason. He knew their hearts and called them out; “you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. **27**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6: 26b-27a). Like manna in the wilderness, and barley bread by the Sea of Galilee, there is nothing that we buy that has staying power. We always find ourselves looking for the latest and greatest. All our gadgets get old. All our cars eventually go away. There is no amount of money we can squirrel away that will feel like abundance. As Christians we strive to know that sufficiency in life is found in Christ. Remember what Jesus said to the crowd in verse 35, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” There is a security in our relationship with Jesus. He loves us unconditionally, “nothing we do could make him love us more, nothing we do could make him love us less.” Let the bread of life fill up your soul and be confident in him.

Stop thinking and acting as if Jesus were a bread king. Did you notice the Galilee crowd’s naïve question? “What must we do to do the works God requires?” So much of life and thinking is transactional, meaning if we do this then there is a reciprocal reaction. For instance, if you have someone over to your house for dinner, and bake homemade bread then they will invite you over for dinner. We shouldn’t make deals with neighbors, and we don’t make deals with God. Jesus again offers clear correction to this question of works; “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” Believe, just that. We are not earners of God’s love; we are objects of God’s love. And His love for us calls us to love others in an unconditional way. In an age of business and leverage, God calls his people to obedience through love and not leverage.

Take a chance. Give up something that seems to give you security or control. For Truly control is an illusion. So here are some suggestions for taking a chance:

Love somebody unconditionally who may not love you back. Trust the sufficiency of your love in Jesus, the bread of life, by selflessly giving your love away.

Give some time away, don’t do it for a pat on the back, or for a check mark for an assignment, or for a service point. Make an appointment to do something that makes a difference for somebody else. Let the deed be the reward.

So many of us hold onto money as an end in itself. I’ve taken many mission trips to Juarez, Mexico and have seen what true poverty looks like. We have so much money, and we hold onto it so tightly. Sometimes I think it’s hard to think of Jesus as sufficient when we have so much money. If you see your bread [money] as that which fills you, then give some away with no strings attached. Give a chunk away that you will miss and don’t use it to leverage a thank you note or a pat on the back, or something else. Sometimes our wealth is the biggest road block to understanding and living in the sufficiency of Jesus’ love. After all who needs Jesus when we can take care of ourselves?

Let’s circle back to John 6 one more time. After this huge miracle of feeding the people, after the huge sermon and difficult teaching, after all is said and done the crowds dissipate. Some just couldn’t accept what Jesus was saying. Some just wanted barley bread, to fill their hungry stomachs. Jesus looks at his disciples in verse 67 and asks, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answers, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” [John 6:68-69] Peter got it. He understood that there was no one else to look for and certainly no bread king to wait for. He had feasted on the bread of life, and because of that Peter was willing to give all, even his life in his service. Oh, the amazing things that people do, when their souls are satisfied!