

I Am the Bread of Life (John 6) A meditation

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Thank you Mr Gray, and thank you men at Shore for a few minutes of your time today to listen to me and listen to God as He wants to speak to you about Himself and His love for you. He provides for you in so many ways. And He especially wants you to believe in Jesus. Today's message is about just that.

My wife, kids and I moved to Sydney 10 years ago from New York City. There I remember the old line-- They say Chinese food isn't very filling-- "A few hours later, you're hungry again." In contrast to that, New York's Jewish delis are known for their very large, overstuffed sandwiches, prompting the even older line: "72 hours later, you're hungry again."

[The line is often attributed to the late New York Times cultural reporter Richard F. Shepard, but it appears in a 1972 New York Times story by food writer Raymond Sokolov.]

You've been looking of late here in chapel at the issue of Jesus claiming to be the Great I Am, thus claiming equality with God. Awesome identity and awesome claim to be sure.

The reading today, from John chapter six, tells us that Jesus claimed to be The Bread of Life. And he claimed that in the synagogue in Capernaum, up in his old neighbourhood in the Galilee. Wow, big claim in front of the neighbours who knew you when you were a kid, who know your parents and siblings.

Keith Green was a plane crash victim in 1982 in the US, but before that he was a big name in Christian rock music. In his song to his unsaved parents one of whom was Jewish, Green's words remind us of today's passage from the Bible: "And they were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'" John 6.42 Green sang, "And it's only that I care, I really, really only want just to see you there. Isn't that Jesus? Isn't it Joseph and Mary's son? Well didn't he grow up right here? He played with our children" "What you must be kidding? (Jesus) thinks he's a prophet. Well, prophets don't grow up from little boys, do they?"

Do they?

Maybe you have experienced that kind of intolerant rejection from those who know you pretty well, in your family or neighbourhood when you have tried to share with people about your love for Jesus. We are not talking about ordinary aloofness, but rejection for righteousness' sake. But that's for another talk.

Today we're looking at Jesus being somehow able to be called bread.

Now that sounds pretty unimportant, isn't it? I mean, maybe fettucini alfredo or Shark's fins or Chutney Kashmiri or a rack of lamb over mashed

and you are talking significant foods, but bread? Come on, how mundane. How ordinary!

But wait, in context, this is during a Sabbath lecture. And it follows a working of a miracle: the feeding of the thousands. Hunger and satisfaction of hunger had been the theme in the last pericope in the Bible, so Jesus uses their concerns to teach about Himself.

Isn't that always the way it is with Him?

He did that with Nicodemus in chapter 3 of John in teaching the Jewish rabbi about eternal life and faith. He did that in John chapter 4 with the woman at the well, whose chief concerns were getting water and avoiding social interaction, as Jesus taught her that he was the water of life, or Living Water.

So here it's not unusual that He uses ordinary information and common objects to teach about Himself being the Living Bread or Bread of Life.

But, and here's the big but of John's writings, the use of the natural is always in opposition or at least lesser comparative to the supernatural. That makes sense when we think about it, that human bread is less than heavenly bread or human birth is less than divine second birth or natural H₂O is less than the springs of water from heaven. Sure, we can sort that out, but we have the advantage of 2,000 years and the reading from the Bible. Those people, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and the crowds here in our text were living it, in the moment, and caught up in natural information, for which we really cannot blame them.

When they thought about what their stomach wanted, they were not thinking eternal food and eternal life and God stuff. They were thinking about their next meal.

Now get this. Jesus had just fed 5,000 people with a few loaves. He had performed a major miracle. And Passover, the Bible says, "was at hand." (6.4) Passover is the time when God saved the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, delivered them through the Red Sea and brought them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land in a few decades. And Jewish people celebrate this holiday by eating certain foods, and avoiding others. The main food to eat on Passover is unleavened bread. Bread is the main object of thought in the kitchens of Jewish people then and now. So it's fitting that Jesus used that image as well. And in the wilderness each morning God provided 'manna', a type of bread as a way of taking care of His children. God sent it down each morning those 40 years, so again Jesus uses this image to describe Himself as bread. And at that the 'true bread' which came down from heaven.

So much bread imagery! It's as if you are just coming off a 3-day fast, and the commercials on the radio have all been about Hungry Jack's Summer Stunner Deal, and you are walking past another Vietnamese bakery, next to Baker's Delight, and all you can smell is bread. You simply cannot miss the weight of this. Bread, bread, everywhere, and lots of rolls to eat.

Do you remember where Jesus was born? What town? Bethlehem, which is a word made up by a pair of Hebrew words meaning "House of Bread."

Some biblical imagery link so naturally, it's hard to miss it.

Let me show you two more links, if I might.

Elisha is the prophet in the Older Testament who came after Elijah. He had to handle many a tough circumstance and in 2 Kings chapter 4 a famine was in the land. Israel in those days would have been like our outback, without rain for years, until this recent rain. So the famine was on, and Elisha saved the day by bringing out meal and providing, actually doing the miracle of feeding the many, as the Bible says, “they ate and had some left over.”

And his attendant said, “What, shall I set this before a hundred men?” But he said, “Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left over.’” So he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD. (2 Kings 4.43-44)

No wonder the expression in John 6 tells us that the people ate and had some left over, thus reminding the people of the miracles of the prophets.

But wait, there’s more.

Not only is there reference here to the Passover and unleavened bread, not only to the feeding of the 5,000 similar to Elisha, not only is there significant reference to the manna which daily fed the Jewish nomads in the 40 years of the wilderness, but the Eucharist is also in view. See John 6, verses 53-54.

Jesus therefore said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

We see past tense bread in manna, as well as bread in the present in the feedings, the immediate future bread in communion, and the eschatological bread is in view as well where there will be a heavenly banquet and hidden manna. (Luke 14.15, Revelation 2.17, 19.9, 2 Apoc. Bar. 29.8)

If we think only naturally, we will miss it, as so many of my forebears missed it in the days of Jesus. But if we listen with ears of faith, and open our hearts to God’s message, and believe, we will have eternal life. Now and later. That’s a powerful word, all from the declaration of Living Bread.

Bottom line, today, men at Shore, God wants you to believe Him, not only for help in sitting examinations, not only for help with the girls. He wants you to trust Him with your very life. As I conclude, hear these words of the Saviour, and take them on board.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6.35)

Actual Text:

John 6.25 And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”

John 6.26 Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.

John 6.27 “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal.”

John 6.28 They said therefore to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

John 6.29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

John 6.30 They said therefore to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?”

John 6.31 “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’”

John 6.32 Jesus therefore said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.

John 6.33 “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”

John 6.34 They said therefore to Him, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.”

John 6.35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

John 6.36 “But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

John 6.37 “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

John 6.38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 6.39 “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6.40 “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6.41 ¶ The Jews therefore were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”

John 6.42 And they were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’”

John 6.43 Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves.

John 6.44 “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6.45 “It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.

John 6.46 “Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

John 6.47 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

John 6.48 “I am the bread of life.

John 6.49 “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

John 6.50 “This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

John 6.51 “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

John 6.52 ¶ The Jews therefore began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”