



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer." Amen.

Do you remember the first time you ever went to an all-you-can-eat buffet? As adults, those places kind of lose their appeal. With an increase in age and experience usually comes the important lesson that quality is to be preferred over quantity. But not when you're a child. As a child, those places were like a dream come true. For that evening, you did not have to eat what your parents lovingly served up for dinner.

As strange as it might sound, it seems as though some of the people following Jesus through Galilee saw Him in that same way. With a few loaves of bread and a couple of small fish, Jesus fed a crowd of over 5,000 people with leftovers to spare. In a time and culture in which many people likely lived a hand-to-mouth existence, the miracle of this feeding meant providence, stability, and a limitless supply of food to satisfy their daily hunger. In fact, the people were so excited at this prospect they intended to drag Jesus to Jerusalem and place a crown on His head so they could enjoy this giver of bread and all He could do for them.

But they missed the point. Jesus didn't come to bring bread. He came to be bread, as the bread of life. In His famous Bread of Life discourse in our gospel lesson, Jesus turns the focus away from physical bread that just satisfies hunger for a time, and points us to the true life-giving bread that brings eternal joy: Himself. He is the bread of life that satisfies every one of our needs in this life and the next. The manna of the Exodus story did not give life. What Moses gave them was not the true bread from Heaven, but Jesus is the true bread and the living bread, and whoever eats of this bread will live forever.

The people following Him wanted to see another miraculous sign. They felt because their forefathers ate manna in the desert for 40 years, provided by Moses, they needed to see a sign, almost trying to coax them into giving them more food. And Jesus didn't miss the opportunity to teach them and us a very important lesson. Being hungry for all the wrong things will only leave you even emptier inside. Jesus said, I tell you the truth. You are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

Sometimes food can serve a purpose greater than simply filling a stomach for a few hours. Think about it. When you and your loved ones are gathered around the Thanksgiving table, what are you celebrating, turkey and stuffing? Or rejoicing in God's blessings, especially those blessings you call family, sitting and eating with you. Sometimes food can serve a purpose greater than simply filling a stomach for a few hours, but the people following Jesus missed the point. John had it right in the prologue to his gospel when he said, the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Like I said, when we talked about the feeding of the 5,000, that miracle wasn't primarily about food. It's about God who makes promises and keeps them. A God who provides.

Jesus wanted to use that physical reality of food to draw their focus away from the temporary and perishable and put it on the eternal and imperishable, but they missed the point. We hear that same promise of Jesus: I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be thirsty. This is the food that endures to eternal life. Jesus promises to give us all that He is and all that He has. He says it's yours, but like those people following Jesus, it comes so naturally to focus on all things they would like to have to make their life more comfortable, and in the process, leave the bread of life in the bread box.

Furthermore, Jesus declares that His hearers must not work for food of no enduring value, but for the eternal sustenance that the Son of Man can provide. Manna had come to represent the essence of life and the world to come. But here the gospel says that it is through Jesus that the true and enduring manna of God is manifested. Jesus, the Messiah upon whom Abba the Father has set His seal, is that heavenly food. Jesus' response to the people's question shows a clear difference between His interests and theirs. Jesus provides that which was not provided in the time of the Exodus, living bread. He talks about the bread that gives true life to the world, the life that belongs to the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness. The life in Jesus Christ, the Savior. The bread of life.

If we come to Him, we will never be hungry. If we believe in Him, we will never be thirsty. The crowd then asks Jesus what they must do to perform the works of God. Jesus responds with the revolutionary teaching that the works of God consist not in actions but in committing oneself to the revelation that God has sent in Christ Jesus. Thus, the indispensable work of God is believing in Jesus Christ. It cannot be achieved, but is to be received by faith and only this leads to eternal life.

Once again, the crowd asked for a visible sign as they recalled the remarkable provision of manna to their ancestors in the wilderness. Manna was seen as bread from Heaven and was further identified with God's law that provided nourishment to the Jewish people. Jesus reminds them that it was not Moses but God the Father who gave them bread from Heaven to eat. Moreover, the manna in the wilderness was no more than an expedient provision for a temporary need until

they reached the Promised Land. Everyone who ate the manna, even Moses, had died. In contrast, the true bread from Heaven gives eternal life to the world.

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The crowd is ready to accept the fact that Jesus might offer them bread, but they are still thinking of a material substance as Jesus proclaims, I am the bread of life, and He promises whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. As the bread of life, Jesus will satisfy the deep hunger of all people for all eternity. The miracle is one of faith as the pursuit of temporary temporal concerns gives way to a radically new pattern of life embodied in Jesus. When we focus on salvation and eternal life through Jesus, our once primary concerns about earthly things become secondary. Our constraint in the earthly life no longer burdens or worries us. The bread of life changes the focus of our concern, and we're always thankful to God. We do not thirst or hunger anymore. Through the wonderful grace of God, we have the bread of Heaven, the bread of life we also have a responsibility and duty to share the bread with others. As Jesus Himself is the bread to feed others, we also need to be the bread of life, giving ourselves to others. And bread it was that the crowd was looking for when they saw Jesus on the other side of the lake.

To come to Jesus only for bread that satisfies our bodies one day and leaves us hungry the next, to turn to Him only for physical and immediate blessings of this world is to miss the significance of who Jesus is. And indeed to miss the significance of what life itself is all about. The imagery of eating and drinking connects to a central religious metaphor: hunger and thirst. There are those who hunger and thirst for God, for justice, for meaning, for life. For John, Jesus is the answer to that hunger and thirst. Jesus is the bread of life who satisfies our hunger and thirst. Jesus indicates this when He says, you are looking for me because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill, do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

In our fears and insecurities, it is so easy to focus our attention on the gratification of our physical needs, that we forget that there are greater things, things that satisfy not only the body but the soul. Bread is a good image for all of this because bread is important to all of us. There's more than enough bread, more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on this planet, yet thousands perish each day for a lack of food. They perish in part because of the fears of those who have food, who fear that they will not have enough, or that

they share their food without price, without cost, that they will have to live with less.

Think of the sin of it all. The blindness, the lack of understanding, the lack of trust, the lack of love. Farmers are paid by our government to not grow food. Marketing boards order the destruction of accumulated supplies of food so that the prices will not fall below a certain level. Large wholesalers of food toss food out that has come to its expiration rather than distribute it to places and persons who are in need. We are driven by our sense of need, by our desire to have more for ourselves, and by our inability to imagine any other realm. And so people starve in the midst of plenty.

Jesus said, you are looking for me because you ate the loaves of bread until you were full, not because you saw miraculous signs in me. John's purpose and the purpose of the signs and miracles that Jesus performs are to say that Jesus has come to do more than simply lead the people out of physical slavery and into a land flowing with milk and honey. That in fact, He is one with God and that He has come to deliver all people from their bondage of sin and death, and to bring to us the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Wherein lies the tree whose fruit gives eternal life, and the rivers whose waters give life to all people.

The crowd seems to miss that. They see Jesus simply as a wonder worker, as one who can perform signs and fill stomachs. John wants us to know Jesus is more than a wonder worker, that Jesus came to feed us with what lasts until eternal life, that He is more than one who is able to provide the food that our bodies need, that food, which already exists in abundance upon this earth. John wants us to know that Jesus came to feed us with what lasts until eternal life, that He came to give us bread of Heaven, that He is in fact the bread of Heaven, the one whom if we believe in Him, is able to nourish us unto eternity, the one who is in fact the bread of life.

This is the work God requires, says Jesus, when speaking to the crowd in Capernaum, the work that provides food that endures to eternal life, to believe in the one He has sent. And when the crowd asks Jesus to give them this bread from now on, He says, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Look around the world today. It is like it was so long ago. It is populated with people who are having their fill of bread of this earth, yet longing for more earthly blessings. We are called by God, the giver of life, to eat the bread of life; that bread provided by Him and through Him and in Him in Christ Jesus. That bread that is shared at our communion table and communion rails, when we receive it by faith and in faith, it builds us up in the one who came to give it to us, the one who was with God at the beginning, and through whom all things were made.

When we celebrate the sacrament of holy baptism, we celebrate the love of God revealed in the life and death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, and how that love reaches out to embrace all people who would open themselves to receive it. And as we celebrate the Lord's Supper today, we celebrate how the one whom we called the bread of life is broken and given to all who are at the table and the rails that they may eat and live. Where people are being harshly oppressed, the table of the Lord speaks of exodus or deliverance from bondage. Where believers are rejected or imprisoned for their faith, the bread and the cup reveal the life of the one who was rejected by people but has become the chief stone of the corner.

Where discrimination by race, sex, or class is a danger for the community, the table of Christ enables people of all sorts to partake of one food and to be made one people. Where people are affluent and at ease with life, the bread and the cups say as Christ shares his life, share what you have with the hungry. Where a congregation is isolated by politics or a war or geography, the Lord's Supper unites us with all God's people in all places and all ages. Where a sister or brother is near death, the last Supper becomes a doorway into the kingdom of our loving father.

Today, let us go past the surface of appearance of this world and the immediacy of our physical needs, and celebrate the one who brought this world's life out of the deep unordered waters of creation, and who in Christ Jesus gives us the bread of Heaven that we may eat and never die. The waters of baptism are poured that we may become one with the one who gave His life for us. The table of the Lord is set so that together we may be made strong in this world and prepare to enter the world to come.

Amen.