

Sermon: Jesus Bread of Life

John 6:35, 41-51

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About a billion people in our world are undernourished. Another billion people are estimated to have a lack of vitamins and minerals, they are malnourished.

About a third of all deaths in children are due to them not having enough food, or food that does not give them what they need.

1 Bread of Life

That a lack of food can lead to disease and death, is common knowledge. That is why the claim of Jesus, that he is the bread of the world, is so important.

But Jesus did not speak of physical nourishment; he addressed the fact that mankind suffers from being *spiritually* undernourished.

Bread was essential food in the time of Jesus. To have bread meant to live; without bread, the people died. If today we have no bread, we will eat something else. Your fridge is full, I guess.

What did Jesus mean when he said: "I am the bread of life"?

Clearly by *life* Jesus meant something more than mere *physical* existence. Life has spiritual meaning as well. Real life includes relating to God, with trust and obedience and love. And in that realm, we all, *naturally*, suffer from a deficit.

Jesus claims that the hunger of the human situation is ended when we know him and through him, we know God. The restless soul is at rest; the hungry heart is satisfied.

He is essential for us in this life and for eternal life.

Can we serve God today without Jesus on our side? Can we know God without knowing Jesus? Even when we surround ourselves with wealth, family, friends, with health, can we be satisfied without Jesus being part of our life? It would be so utterly empty.

Jesus offers himself to us as the one who gives us temporary and eternal satisfaction. He promises to meet you in your deepest needs and to satisfy your highest aspirations.

That makes it worthwhile to pause for a moment and to wonder - what are your main needs, presently?

What are your main needs?

Jesus promises to satisfy you. He may not meet all of our *felt* needs - but he does satisfy your *real* needs.

When the Jewish leaders from the synagogue in Kapernaum heard Jesus say these things, they whispered together, they grumbled.

That was quite rude of them, to do this in the presence of Jesus and his disciples.

I think that John purposely mentions that the Jews grumbled, because this was also what they did in the desert at the time of their exodus, 1500 years previously. In Exodus we read,

The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. [...] "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill [us] with hunger. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you." (Ex 16:1-4)

The Jews grumbled, in the desert, and they got manna. They did this again, when Jesus offered himself as the true living bread that comes from above.

2 - Bread from Heaven

I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

He came down from heaven. With these words Jesus did not in a vague sort of way suggest that he was heavenly inspired or something like that. And he did not, like some modern gurus, suggest that he had a divine spark in his human body.

The grumbling Jewish leaders understood that Jesus claimed that previously he had been with God in heaven, and that he had come down to this world from heaven.

That is why these Jewish critics immediately reacted, 'he is just the a carpenter's son', they knew he had grown up in Nazareth.

They saw him as a human person only. And human he was, surely, Jesus speaks of giving his flesh. He was tangible as we are. He is no myth, he is real.

Jesus was fully human, bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh.

This is important for us, because this means that he can understand you, empathize with you, stand beside you as your great brother with his helping arm around you. He knows *how* he can satisfy your needs.

He came from heaven to become a real human being. But he never had a human father and he was born from a virgin.

He was human, but also divine. Indeed, not an angel or something less than God - but divine.

Not only does he *want* to satisfy your needs and he knows *how*, because he was fully human, but he is also *able* to do this - because he is God himself.

In Jesus we see God adopting human life. When God gave the manna in the desert, he only gave a temporary gift. But when Jesus came, God gave himself. God himself is the gift to you. He is with us in our desert to give our life an eternal aspect.

The unity of Jesus with God is underlined by what seems to be a circular argument:

'No-one comes to the Father except through me, Jesus says. But Jesus also says what sounds like the opposite: 'Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.'

So where does it begin and end? Those who obey God the Father, believe in Jesus. And those who believe in Jesus, will also know the Father.

Jesus, the Son of God, and God the Father, are so intimately together, that we can't, we can not, have only one of them. They always operate together, based on their essential unity.

Jesus is fully human, yes, but also God from God, light from light. He underlines this with his statement: "I AM the bread".

Seven times in the Gospel of John, Jesus begins a statement with the words 'I AM'. I am the bread is the first one, but you also know others: I AM the light of the world, I AM the Good Shepherd, etc.

These words I AM remind us of God who told Moses at the burning bush: I AM who I am, JHWH. Jesus made another claim to deity here. He is JHWH.

No wonder the Jews argued with each other.

And Jesus made yet another important claim; He said to the grumbling Jewish leaders:

It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. (John 6:45)

Jesus connected the fact that people came to him and believed in him, directly with the words of the prophets that 'all people will be taught by God'.

The words Jesus used are a paraphrase from Isaiah 54:13, where Jesus describes the new kingdom that Israel was waiting for, and with the restored city of Jerusalem.

Isaiah prophesied that a new time would come when people shall be taught by God himself.

Jesus says: Now this time has come, now all people will be taught by God himself. And the heart of what the Father teaches the people, is faith in Jesus Christ, and to know God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That is the most satisfying thing in life. To know God is to live. This is food that satisfies into eternity. This is the bread of life.

God is our great teacher. Jesus was always teaching. And the Holy Spirit is called the teacher. Our faith in God is not some vague feeling, but it has content. This content must be taught.

We have to be taught by God through his word, and we have to teach our kids, our teenagers, each other. That is much more than reading a bit here or there. What teaching do you receive, to be better grounded in the Christian faith, to better know God?

3 - Bread to Eat

If Jesus Christ is indeed this bread of life, if he even satisfies into eternity, how can we eat that bread? How can we participate?

Jesus tells us what we have to do.

But he first makes clear that all begins with God. he is drawing us to the Bread of Life. God draws us to himself.

This word 'drawing' is the same word used in the New Testament for drawing a heavily laden net to the shore. It is used of Paul and Silas being dragged before the magistrates in Philippi.

Always there is this idea of friction and resistance. Just like teenagers are sometimes drawn to church. And how you are maybe here because your wife has drawn you. :)

God draws you to himself, to the bread of life, and we try to resist.

Well, God is not pleading, or crying for you to come to him. He draws. And you feel it. And you just can't escape from it.

God draws by working in your life. A very important method for this is the teaching that I mentioned. God pulls through his Word and its proper explanation. By people teaching us.

Jesus says that we have to come to him. Do not stand far-off, to wait and see. Do not avoid him as he draws through his word; come closer by prayer. Come to the community of believers, where Jesus rules.

The Jewish leaders were sometimes close to Jesus, so close that they actually listened to him. They listened, but they did not come to learn.

The only listening that is worth while is hearing to learn; and that is the only way to hear God speak to you - if you want to hear for the sake of doing.

Coming to Jesus, the bread of life, creates faith and strengthens faith. To just sit and wait for faith to come, does not work. But being close to Jesus generates faith in him.

So when you feel down and unsatisfied, if you are not doing well, the answer is not to withdrawal from the Christian community, but the opposite. Expose yourself to God, by being close to Jesus and by listening to his Word, in the community of his people.

So listen much, be where the bread of life can be found, in the community of God's people.

Concretely, we also receive Holy Communion in order to eat the bread of life. Jesus lifted up the bread at the last supper before he died, and he said, *this is my body*.

At the communion table Jesus gives himself to us, and we receive him and we believe in Him. That is why in our church we never have a church service without Holy Communion.

If you want life, you must come and sit at that table where you eat that broken bread and drink that poured-out wine which somehow, in the grace of God, brings you into contact with the love and the life of Jesus Christ.

Our coming to Jesus is not a matter of mere curiosity, nor a meeting on equal terms; it is essentially a submission. A kneeling before him. To be with him, to listen, to believe, to obey.

And this process gives us life. That is to say, it puts us into a new and lovely relationship with God, wherein he becomes an intimate friend; we are now at home with the one whom we feared or never knew before.

And this attachment to God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - helps us through this life and into eternity. Being linked to the Eternal one ensures your eternal security. Nothing more, nothing less.

No searching of the human mind or longing of the human heart can find God apart from Jesus.

Conclusion

Maybe a billion, even 2 billion people suffer from physical malnourishment. That is not likely to be your problem.

But if you suffer from spiritual undernourishment, do something about it.

I am the Bread of Life, Jesus promises. Nothing less than Jesus himself will satisfy.

Amen