

What bread are you seeking? A sermon preached
On February 7, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian
Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons; EXODUS 16:11-21
JOHN 6:25-35

Many had been trailing Jesus owing to his miracles which to this point had mainly consisted of healing the sick.

Chapter 6 in John begins with the account of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000.

It is a familiar story

Large crowd gather to listen to Jesus and so enthralled by his words that they stay well beyond their meal time

Playfully – because John tells us the reader, what Jesus is going to do-- Jesus says to Philip **Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?**

This is not a place where there is a Save On, Costco or Superstore close by

Not even a 7-11

And even if there was AND there was sufficient stock, can you imagine the disciples walking into a store and saying, I need bread for 5,000 right now please

Gracious I know the looks I get when I ring in the Quality Street chocolates for the third Sunday in Advent!

Then too Philip says **Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little (vs, 7)**

I have a drachma, how about you Andrew or you Peter

Judas, how much money is in the common purse that you guard so closely?

You have a drachma Philip, snaps Judas, you are not supposed to have any money – I am to keep ALL the money

⁸ **One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' [John6:8, 9]**

Remember the disciples have already been present and seen Jesus bend the rules of the expected and possible

But having seen – they still do not see with comprehension!

While the disciples are still in a state of rising panic, with Judas looking particularly furtive, lest he will have to turn over the contents of the group's purse

Jesus says **-make the people sit down** and the 5,000 gathered are fed with five barley loaves and two fish.

And not just fed, but well filled, as there are 12 baskets of left overs collected.

It is a marvelous story and sets in motion this morning's I AM

I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty (vs. 35)

All who are present that day can no longer deny or ignore that there is something very different about this man Jesus.

To avoid the inappropriate enthusiasm of those who would make Jesus king by force, Jesus withdraws by himself further up the mountains.

It is not just weariness this time that causes Jesus to withdraw

There was at the time a very strong belief present that when the Messiah who all the Jews were eagerly awaiting finally appeared,

One of the signs that it was the true Messiah was he would produce manna, bread, from heaven

This of course goes back to the story – a portion of which Veronica read from Exodus – where in response to the Israelites murmuring and complaining about no food – God provides adequate manna every morning – for two million people. And provides this for 40 years.

The disciples are left to take a ship to Capernaum and Jesus later joins them there by walking on the water (6:16-21)

The people are still on Jesus' trail (the people are always on Jesus' trail).

They catch up with him at Capernaum

It is there that they begin to ask questions – this morning's reading from John 6

Now if the lesson sounds a bit chopped up – that's not Veronica's reading – that is the John's editorializing.

John is not giving a verbatim account of the conversation, but hitting only on the high points. It is a conversation that may have lasted many days in different settings!

One of the first things Jesus is asked is - **give us another sign (vs.30)**

Sure, you have provided food for 5,000 people for one afternoon – Moses provided food for an entire nation for 40 years!

If Jesus is really the Messiah, then he will at least have to equal that!

And to back up their demand, they quote from the Old Testament (**He gave them bread from heaven to eat**)

Commentators say this demand is not from one section of scripture, but put together from three verses in the Old Testament –Exodus 16:4, Nehemiah 9:15 and Psalm 78:24,25

Bread, manna and loaves.

As with the majority of the I AM's, it is full of rich associations and memory triggers

And, it is an everyday image of 1st century Palestine.

Then as now, bread was a staple for life.
 Owing to the ongoing need for bread – the sound of the grindstones milling the grain was an everyday sound in all villages
 It would be easily heard,
 There being little other sound to mask its distinctive screeching grate,

In so many ways, we are removed from a simpler yet more marginal life for most in Jesus' time.

Roman military occupation,
 Daily life subject to the vagaries of weather and insects

No social safety net except the immediate family – not great for widows, orphans, the aged without family.

This was life on the edge and it was truly where the majority of the people lived

So when Jesus speaks of the bread of life

Giving life to the world

Meaning no more hunger, it is little wonder so many people seized on this I AM and perhaps saw it only in terms of the satisfaction of physical hunger **Sir give us this bread always**

I wonder, if in the western world with its conspicuous consumption and signs of affluence too much with us,

The bite of this and so many of the I AM's of Jesus have lost much of their power.

For now, as then, Jesus is not speaking about satisfying physical hunger, which comes and goes

But satisfying a greater hunger – a gnawing need for meaning and purpose in this life,

Living a life that matters

For followers of Jesus, living a life that reflects God's love, care, provision, mercy and grace to others and to oneself.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

What does this declaratory affirmation say to us today?

It is an affirmation that reminds us of *God's ongoing daily provision of our needs as well as a considerable number of our wants.*

Jesus reminds his hearers then and now – It was NOT Moses who gave you the bread from heaven (the manna) – it was and is God.

Moses was merely the vehicle or vessel through whom God worked.

In the case of the Israelites, it was not a short term provision, but every day for 40 years.

At least one and in many cases more than one generation would not have first-hand knowledge of Egyptian oppression – but they would know very well about the manna.

It was not fancy provision

In time, it would itself become a source of grumbling in certain quarters – manna – baked, fried, boiled, pickled, pineapple upside down manna or banana manna

I wonder after a time, a Biblical equivalent of Jamie Oliver, Michael Smith or Lynn Crawford emerged to suggest new and different ways to serve and prepare the same old manna

The manna was not fancy provision, but it sustained life until the Promised Land!

God's answer to the grumbling for food and longing to return to Egypt – *provision to survive and move toward freedom.*

God still provides daily – not always in fancy ways, but his provision will sustain us. Ultimately all things, including life itself is a gift from him

Affluence and bottom line profit of a consumer culture clouds this truth, so much so that we begin to believe it is all about US.

My job, my money, my career, my savings, my house, my toys, my family, my hard work, my life – REALLY??

Ultimately, all things are gift.

Ultimately, all things come from God

Ultimately, all things are held in trust for God.

Ultimately, we own nothing

It is God who provides the most basic to survive and thrive in this life

This morning's declaratory affirmation about Jesus as the bread of life and the account of God's provision of manna in the wilderness is also a *call to live daily a life that is forever thankful to God.*

Thanksgiving is not just a day on a calendar – it is an attitude and approach to life that is to be practiced every day of every year--not in a syrupy or icky religious manner.

Rather in a manner that recognizes that God's mercy, love, grace, forgiveness is new every morning

To not only be on the watch for signs of wonder and awe all around us,

But to eagerly expect and seek out ways that such mercy, love, grace, forgiveness is daily shown in our lives and in the lives of others around us

For some of us this comes second nature

An appreciative and grateful to God for each new day is wired into our characters.

We know for instance that though we may be stuck in a fresh pile of horse manure,

We can see beyond the manure and know there is a pony somewhere!!

Many of us though have to be encouraged to see beyond the piles of manure in our lives We have to be taught, reminded constantly it seems that though the manure is there and we may well be stuck in it – life is difficult – it is not an unending and unswerving loop of bad news!!! There really are many things for which to be thankful,

Many good moments

Savor them – however fleeting – and rest on the promises of God which affirm over and again, God will never abandon us – no matter what we have or have not done –

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

This morning's declaratory affirmation about Jesus as the bread of life also *calls for a decision from each of us*

For Jesus did not just utter any of the I AM's for dramatic effect

In part, he spoke them to get his hearers to think about what he was saying
 And the implications in their own lives to what he was saying!

By the end of chapter 6 it is clear some of those who heard Jesus, grumbled and thought it was all a bit too much!

We never hear again of these people.

I wonder, did they eventually just give up.

Some gave up and left there and then – real commitment to Jesus was not for them.

A few – including the disciples – stuck with it.

Peter of course makes one of his chest beating declarations:

'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'^[a]

A declaration which is called into question at the time of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin

And Judas – I wonder if Judas sensed what he, Judas, was about to do.

I wonder if information about Judas is a bit of revisionist story telling by John.

The question remains though – which group would each or any of you come into?

I don't do hand raising, but it is a question that demands an answer

And not just once in a lifetime, but over and over again.

Jesus wants to be the Bread of Life for you,
for me,

But that demands a *response of commitment*.

Will you grudgingly make a few halfhearted attempts only to give up when the going gets tough?

Maybe you will walk out of here this morning and never “get” what Jesus has for you.

Or will you say, “I know it might well be tough, but Jesus is my only hope.

I believe!

I receive

I commit myself to him

Will you echo the words of the old hymn chorus?

*I will arise and go to Jesus
He will embrace me in his arms
In the arms of my dear Saviour,
O there are ten thousand charms*

That is something to ponder as we turn to receive communion in a few moments time.

AMEN