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Scripture: John 6: 22-71

Sermon Title: Jesus the Bread of Life

John 6:22-71

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Bread from Heaven

22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not gotten into the boat with his disciples but that his disciples had gone away alone. 23 But some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. 24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 26 Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” 28 Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” 30 So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ” 32 Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which[a] comes down from

heaven and gives life to the world.” 34 They said to him, “Sir,[b] give us this bread always.”

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away, 38 for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day. 40 This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” 43 Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, 55 for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” 59 He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.

The Words of Eternal Life

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him. 65 And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67 So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to

believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”[c] 70 Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.” 71 He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot,[d] for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him. (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today, we come to a significant passage of Scripture focusing on Jesus as the Bread of Life. In our text there is so much content I want to simplify what we are to learn this morning by highlighting just a few ideas and making them applicable to our lives.

First, I want to reflect with you on Jesus’ concern with the crowds who follow him.

Second, I want us to explore what it means that Jesus is the Bread of Life.

And Third, I want to connect this passage to the gift of Holy Communion. (Sacramental)

As I mentioned before we read today, the context of where we are in the book of John is that Jesus has just walked on water and with his disciples he has come to the shore. The people catch up with him and start asking for him questions. Jesus seems to know that the people are not motivated properly. Jesus thinks they just want more food, but they don't understand what he really wants to give them is himself. The people even compare Jesus to Moses and remind Jesus that Moses gave the Israelites manna, so why shouldn't they want bread or other provision like that from Jesus. Jesus reminds them that even the manna was from God not really from Moses.

As we read this part of the story, it might be easy to think to ourselves oh we are not like those self-centered folks who are following Jesus and just wanting stuff from him, but in reality I

wonder if a better response is to acknowledge that all of us can fall into the habit of wanting Jesus for what he gives us.

We can fall into following Jesus because he gives us a spiritual high from time to time or maybe we like that following God provides us tasty fellowship food after church. I mean that is kind of nice. Maybe following Jesus makes us feel like we are spiritual or somehow a better person than others.

Jesus is not opposed to giving us nice things, but he wants us to move out of purely self-focused motives for following him. Jesus is asking for more.

Jesus offers himself as the Bread of Life. One of the key parts of our text today is found in verses 35-40, where Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 Everything that the

Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away, 38 for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day. 40 This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

Jesus describes the work of God as believing in him, trusting in him with our lives. He promises that those who trust in him will have eternal life both in heaven and on earth.

Yet, what Jesus wants is often more than we may first suspect when we become Christians. Jesus wants a relationship with us, but he also asks us to trust him with our lives and for us to join in the mission of Christ in the world.

In the end following Jesus can be costly. Following Jesus means we turn our lives over to God and become passionate not about

personal fame, wealth, or achievement. Following Jesus and knowing him as the bread of life is about joining in the work of the kingdom of God, which is all about caring for those on the margins.

(Unidos Story)

As we follow Jesus, we are promised life, but we also join in the sorrows of Jesus.

I think it can be pretty tough as Christians when we learn that following Jesus does not always lead to spiritual highs. Being a Christian does not provide security from all of life's problems. It does offer us hope even in hard times.

You may have noticed this week that famous poet and writer Wendell Berry passed away. People are sharing words of tribute and quoting many of his well known poems. One of the most loved is entitled The Peace of Wild Things... He writes...

“When despair grows in me

and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”

As Wendell Berry so beautifully shows, we as human beings often
feel worried about our lives and the world. Jesus comes through
nature and the beauty of the world to offer us grace.

There are moments of freedom to come to us in the beauty of nature. When we go through the struggles of life, we are invited to trust God with our lives, even when tragedies occur and our worries deepen. Life is fragile but grace is also real.

A final focus we may draw from our passage today is its connection to the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Holy Eucharist, what we often call at our communion.

Do you notice the awkward part of this passage where Jesus talks about people eating him and drinking his blood. Jesus says,

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, 55 for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven,

not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

What is Jesus saying here and why does the gospel writer John include this awkward teaching of Jesus. I assume that the early church, which John is writing to has already begun some spiritual practices similar to what we call the Lord’s supper or communion today. This passage may be included to help understand the practice of Holy Communion, which also mirrors the Jewish practice of the Passover meal. The followers of Jesus in our story struggle to follow him after this strange teaching. I imagine the early church also needed to understand the roots of the practice of communion

Here in our passage is the basis for the early church and current modern church practice of the Sacrament of Communion.

Throughout church history, denominations have debated whether the Lord’s supper is to be viewed literally or symbolically. John

Calvin who is the theologian most associated with the Presbyterian

Church historically understood the Lord's supper or communion as spiritual nourishment.

In other Jesus is spiritually present in the bread and the cup. For me personally, I greatly appreciate the sacrament of communion. In the Presbyterian Church USA, we celebrate two sacraments, communion and baptism. The reason our church personally celebrates communion monthly is so that it remains a special Sunday each month to especially honor the spiritual mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. We celebrate the mystery of Jesus as the bread of life. Other churches like the Catholic Church and Episcopal church make the Lord's Supper or what they call the Eucharist the central part of worship weekly. For a time, Karen and I attended an Episcopal Church and we enjoyed the emphasis on the Eucharist weekly.

Some churches use the language of Jesus' blood and body. We normally talk about the bread as the bread of life and the cup as the

cup of blessing. I personally feel a little like those in our passage today in that too much talk of blood and flesh feel strange to me, so I am content to simply see communion as a way to spiritually connect to Jesus who offers us life in relationship with him.

I do believe that the Sacrament of communion is a special grace, so receiving communion helps us connect to Jesus in a special way.

I encourage you to find meaningful connection to Jesus as we celebrate the Lord's Supper monthly. May it be a time to enjoy the presence of Christ and to offer him our struggles and joys. May we find spiritual nourishment as receive the bread and the cup.

Our passage finishes with the main disciples of Jesus following him even when others chose to leave him. I wonder if you ever feel a struggle with your faith. Maybe the mysteries of Scripture feel a little much at times. I encourage us all to put our trust in Jesus, to find strength in him as the bread of life, and to experience encouragement in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Let us pray...