

Wonder Bread

John 6:35, 41-51

INTRO:

Jesus says that he is the “**WONDER BREAD**”, or the “**bread of life.**” We all get hungry deep down, a hunger that can only be fed by the bread that **fills** and **satisfies**. Jesus is that grace-filled bread. Come to him and be fed.

ME:

Let me tell you a little story about me and bread. I have always loved bread. I have rarely met a bread I did not like. The only exception might be stale bread, *but then that is why God created toasters!*

Blackstone, you remember Blackstone, **right? When I was there they used to call me bread boy!**” This is because I was always saying, “**Would you please pass the bread!**”

A few years ago my Doctor recommended a book to me called *Wheat Belly* and another one like it called *Grain Brain*. They are both written by Medical Doctors who have researched the harmful effects of grain, especially modern forms of wheat, on our health. I am trying to eliminate wheat from my diet because of these books. If Blackstone was still open...(let us observe a

few moments of silence, because it is not...) *I would pass the bread! I would be bread boy NO more!*

YOU:

What do you think about bread? What if it is not good for us? Last week Jesus said he was the bread of life. That is a metaphor that spoke to the role of bread in human survival in ancient times. In this case, *bread is most definitely good!* In fact, it is the stuff of life. We should never stop “**eating**” the bread of life, which is **believing** in Jesus. Now that I’ve told you bread is *good*, bread is *bad*, bread is *good*...let’s see if Jesus can unpack this for us in John’s Gospel.

Let’s pray together first...

GOD:

John 6:35 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.

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.”

WE:

The Gospel of John . . . **where one never knows. Water is not really water. Wind is more than wind. Bread is not just bread. Jesus loves to speak in dizzying double-talk in this Gospel. Talk that means much more than it first means. Today’s Gospel is a great example of a speech that points beyond itself to something more than itself. Why not speak clearly, with simplicity, since this speech in service to the risen Christ?** In John’s Gospel, Jesus is the exalted, reigning Lord from verse 1 . . . on to the end. He moves patiently through the Gospel, speaking, declaring, pronouncing words that are . . . pregnant with power. Bread, the most common, essential, and boring of foods, is spoken of again today. In the mind of Jesus, bread is more than bread. Bread is **life**. A metaphor, when it is done right, **takes up** something from our daily experience and **changes** it. The very word **metaphor** is made from the Greek words meaning “**to change**” or “**to transform.**” When an appropriate metaphor is used, our understanding is transformed, moved, deepened.

We are enlightened; we see things in a new light. When Jesus calls himself bread, we are seeing **Jesus** in a new way and **bread** in a new way. Something from **ordinary** life is being used to shed light on something **extraordinary**, or . . . the risen Christ. Jesus **saves** us, yes. But he also **feeds** us. He becomes for us the very stuff of life. Not only does the risen Christ raise us from death to life, dramatically transforming us and our world. But the risen Christ also **stays** with us, **nourishes** us, **cares** for us, **feeds** us, **giving** us what we need to keep at our discipleship. All of John's metaphors are in service of the aim that we might have "**life in his name**" John has transformed some traditional stories about Jesus into a wonderful meal for thousands, and into teaching about bread. John loves to begin with our **misunderstanding** and form a dialogue with Jesus out of our **misunderstanding**. This allows him to interpret what's going on with Jesus, enabling Jesus to respond with highly theological interpretation. Jesus picks up on the historic experience of manna in the wilderness, that "**bread that came down from heaven,**" to show how he is this wondrous *Wonder Bread*.

When Jesus proclaims "**I am**" in this Gospel. It is a lofty, exalted statement about Christ. I am bread filled with life. I am the manna-bread from above. Remember, John's Gospel has no Last Supper, no mention of "**this is my body**" as in the other Gospels. Verse 51 of today's text is John's substitute for those words. In this Gospel, it's all a miraculous, wonderful offering of

Jesus to us; it's all Eucharist, from start to finish. He is bread in the wilderness. When all is said and done, John 6 is a passage that is not to be **analyzed, dissected, and argued**. It is to be **received** like bread, savored, received as a gift, digested, ingested for life, life eternal.

We may or may not know much about Spirit, truth, or **“the Word,”** which occupies much of John's Gospel, but we do know about **hunger**. We know that awful gnawing feeling in the pit of the stomach when we go without food. We also know that awful gnawing pain in the heart of the soul. There are lots of people today who are hungry, but not just for bread. Jesus is talking about that kind of hunger here. When we are hungry, it's a reminder that we are creatures who need nourishment or ... we die. But there is another kind of death. It is the death of the soul, that wasting away that comes when we lose our zest for life, when our eyes seem dull to the world, and when we don't know if we can go on. Death is known to us. Not dramatic, momentary death, but death that comes day by day, drop by drop, funeral by funeral. Maybe you came to church today because you are hungry. I've heard people say that before. **“We are not really being fed at this church.”** They didn't mean that the church was not providing enough covered dish suppers. They meant that their souls were being malnourished. There was not enough substance in the preaching, or the music, or the worship to sustain them through the week and the daily demands of discipleship. Jesus promises that he is bread. He is the bread come down

from heaven, just like the Israelites had manna in the wilderness to sustain them on the exodus from Egypt. Jesus says he is like that bread, come down from heaven to sustain us.

What is your image of Jesus?

- For some, Jesus is the bleeding body hanging on a cross. He just hangs there.
- For others of us, he is the one who sits up on high, God enthroned in heaven.
- Today I want you to think of Jesus in the way he urges here—as bread.

He is that bread . . . that satisfies you . . . when nothing else does. You chew on him, bit by bit, take your time, and savor each morsel. It is not . . . dramatic. It is just . . . life giving. Take time to enjoy him, to let him become **part** of your life and so . . . **give** you life. Sometimes we speak of the dramatic invasions of God among us, those striking, life-changing moments when it is as if God has swept over you, and grabbed you with intensity. But today, Jesus invites us to think of him as bread, as a meal, as that daily, life-giving presence that keeps us going. Many of you may well say this is why you are here in church, Sunday after Sunday. You may say, “**I am here to get nourished to make it through the week.**” They say that in church, there is rarely anything too dramatic, too striking. Mostly, when we are at our best, it’s just the weekly reading of scripture, praying of prayers,

singing of hymns, preaching, and listening to sermons. They suggest that this is why the table, the Lord's table, rather than the pulpit should be the true visual center of a church. For you, it is that which enables you to keep on keeping on as a disciple. It nourishes you. It is your bread. It is your life. Jesus bids us to feed upon him, to ingest him, bit by bit, to take his being into our lives, to let him nourish us unto life. Note that Jesus' stress here is on bread **given**, more than on bread **eaten**. He is the bread that comes down from heaven, as a gift.

All bread, when you think about it, comes down from heaven. All bread is a gift of God, of God's rain, sun, and soil.

A pastor was conducting a workshop in a little church on the meaning of the sacraments. They had discussed baptism and its meaning. When they were working on the Lord's Supper, he told them that a sacrament is some experience from everyday life that is lifted up, in the context of worship, and so sanctified, given sacred significance because of its use in worship. But that seemed too sanctimonious and ... abstract. So he asked them, **"What is the most memorable meal you ever ate?"** They told of memories of meals in fancy French restaurants in Toronto, of a great little bistro they discovered on a trip to San Francisco, of an elaborate ten-course extravaganza in an expensive hotel in New York. Then one man said, **"The best meal I ever had was in World War II, the morning after a night of terrible battle. I staggered up over a hill and saw a woman from the**

Red Cross in a little trailer in a muddy field. I staggered through the muck to her trailer. She was handing out stale doughnuts and cold coffee. When she handed me mine, she smiled. After the night I had suffered, in that place, at that time, I'd have to say that was about the best meal I ever had."

Jesus says, **"I am bread. I am bread come down from heaven to nourish you forever."** I believe in tis bread. Come to him and be fed forever.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Our relationship to Christ is entirely dependent upon Christ an today, Christ promises to give us what we need to keep us going.

YOU:

Are you hungry? How will you feed on Jesus so you will never hunger spiritually?

CLOSE:

When we hold up a loaf of bread at Communion and call it blessed, **what do we mean?**

The farmer plowed the earth and sowed the seed. Rain watered the ground and the seed began to sprout. The farmer plowed and weeded and nurtured and harvested in due time. The grain was processed by the miller.

The flour was transported by the trucker. The baker took the flour and worked it into dough in the early morning hours of a day before dawn. And then the risen dough was baked. The bread was packaged, shipped, unloaded, delivered, put on the shelves by the grocer, bought by someone with the money she had made at her job; it was taken home and served.

When we hold up a loaf of bread, we lift up all of humanity, the world, life itself.

So say a prayer, when you eat bread.

Jesus said, **“I am ... the bread ... of life.”**

Let's pray together...