

Who is Jesus? The Bread of Life

Third Sunday of Pentecost

June 21, 2009

Alannah and I like French Toast in the mornings. When school was still in session this past year, I would get up in the mornings and make “Very Vanilla Cinnamon French Toast” for us, usually with a side of bacon for breakfast. It’s been a while since I’ve done this, not for any huge reason, but mostly because we can’t find any real ‘good’ bread at Shaw’s or Stop-n-Shop that doesn’t cost an arm and a leg to use to make it. Alannah and I finally decided last week we were going to stop looking for others to provide our bread, and instead we were going to make our own loaf of sourdough. Yeah, the ingredients are still sitting in the cupboard at home, and so far no loaf has been made. But suddenly, having breakfast for supper tonight is sounding pretty good!

So follow the steps here: we ran out of good bread, we tried to find it elsewhere, and then we decided we were going to rely on ourselves. It’s been a good month or so since we’ve had “Very Vanilla Cinnamon French Toast .”

In our reading this morning, sort of the same things happened, kinda... First, I invite you to open your Bibles to our Gospel reading, John 6, beginning with verse 25. As I mentioned last week, most of our readings for this series will be in the Gospel of John, the fourth book in the New Testament. John was written by the youngest disciple of Jesus, and the only disciple to die a natural death. His brother, James, was also a disciple of Jesus, and together they were nicknamed, “Boanerges – Sons of Thunder” by Jesus.

The title of this series is “Who is Jesus?”, and each week we’re looking at a different “I am” statement of Jesus to learn what He says about Himself. We can go back and forth all day long on who we think Jesus is, but what we really need to do is let Jesus be the Jesus that He is, and listen to what He says about Himself.

To set the context of our reading this morning, the previous day Jesus had fed 5000 people with just a few loaves of bread and some fish. After that feeding, He left to be by himself, and His disciples set off in a boat to cross a lake and meet Him in the city of Capernaum. On the way, a storm came up, and Jesus walked to them in the boat on the top of the water. He calmed the storm, and they continued their trip to the shore. Meanwhile, the people whom He had fed walked around the shore to the other side of the lake to meet Jesus, and that’s where our verses pick up the conversation today.

So, back to Very Vanilla French Toast and the tie to this incident. First, **they ran out of bread.** Next to these verses you can write “Exodus 16” in the margins of your Bibles – this is the reading Cory read for us this morning, the coming of the manna to the Israelites in the desert.

The people of Israel had literally run out of bread. Once they entered into the Promised Land some two thousand years prior to our reading this morning, the manna from heaven stopped coming to them. They had been taken care of for forty years in the desert, but now it was over. The people who had listened to Jesus the day before literally ran out of bread, too. Even though He had multiplied the loaves, the bread was gone, and though the Bible doesn't say it, they were probably hungry again. Note what 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."* It wasn't the miracle that drew them, it was the filling of their bellies and the emptiness that was there now.

Here's the first point – when they ran out of what they thought they needed, they just wanted more of the same. What about us? A few years ago on my vicarage I had a conversation with the Confirmation class when I asked the question, "What do you need?" The answers ranged from cell phones to iPods to laptop computers and a variety of video game systems. Imagine the quiet in the room when I told them these things are nice, but not necessary. Imagine when I told them all they really need is shelter, food & water, and clothing.

Imagine Jesus saying to the crowd, "You came to me because you want your bellies filled with more bread that's not going to satisfy. You need Me, the Bread of Life!"

Imagine the pregnant pause, the screaming silence that followed the statement, as the people who had just had their wants met earlier are now hearing their lives are not all about their wants; that Jesus is not all about their wants. Jesus is about their needs.

Here's a statement you can take to the bank – Jesus will always disappoint you if you're only looking at the here and now; only looking to have wants met and not needs fulfilled. This doesn't mean Jesus doesn't like to give us the wants, just like He did with the people in the 6th chapter of John when He fed them, it means that's not what He's all about.

We're circling in on that "I am" statement of Jesus and what He says about Himself...

First, they ran out of bread, second, they **looked for bread elsewhere**. Look at verse 28, *"What must we do to do the works God requires?"* "Okay, Jesus, if You're not going to meet my wants, what do I have to do to get my wants met elsewhere?" What do I have to do to appease this God of Yours to get what I want in this life? And Jesus' answer just blows them away – "Believe in the One He sent"; believe in Me.

It's a phenomenon that affects so many people today. Survey after survey reveals the same thing – too many people believe if they are just good enough, if they just do the right things, they are doing the work of God and will go to Heaven. My friends, it's just not true.

Let me ask you a question – what are the symptoms of the Flu? Symptoms are usually body aches, fever, nausea, vomiting, etc. But none of these symptoms on their own means you have the flu. Instead, just the opposite is true – having the flu brings about these things.

The symptoms of believing in Jesus are doing good things, reaching out to others with kind words, helping our neighbors, etc. Any one of these things on their own doesn't make us a Christian, but rather these are the 'symptoms' of being a Christian. Believing in the One God the Father sent to us, makes us 'Christian.'

We're starting to come in for a landing on the Bread of Life...

First, they ran out of bread, second, they looked for bread elsewhere, third, **they relied on themselves to provide their own bread.** More specifically, they relied on what had once existed in the past to provide them what they thought they needed. "Moses gave us bread in the desert – what are You going to do to top that, Jesus?" Take a look at verse 30 and 31, *So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will You give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*

You see when life gets challenging, that's when we often turn to the past and paint a much better picture of what actually once was, rather than looking forward to an even better future. And as is often the case when the past is upheld as the standard for the future, Jesus gave them an answer that didn't sit well with them, starting in verse 48, *"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died."*

And now we've landed on the key issue of what Jesus says about Himself. He is the Bread of Life.

Not the past or what once was, but what is here, now.

Not the 'biggies' of the past, but Him, Himself.

Not the things that once existed, but what He brings from God the Father, who sent Jesus to them in the first place.

He is the one that ultimately satisfies and fills. He is the one who gives eternal life and gives it to all who believe in Him.

He is the one who forgives those confessed and repented-of sins and doesn't remember them anymore.

And He is the one who comes to us today.

It may surprise some of you to know that when Jesus said what He did in our reading today, He wasn't actually talking about the Lord's Supper. Even though He refers to eating His body and

drinking His blood – common Communion terms – remember, He had not instituted the Lord’s Supper yet. Oh, His words today may have been pointing towards the Lord’s Supper that would come at a later date, but in these passages what He’s really talking about is *complete surrender* to Him. Giving things up completely and trusting in Him.

And we don’t like to do that do we? It’s scary to not be in control. It’s scary to give up control. Let me let you in on a little secret: we’re not in control to begin with – God is. The people Jesus was talking to wrestled with this, too.

Take a look at what happened: the people began to grumble in verse 41, “*At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven”, and Jesus told them to stop it in verse 43, “Stop grumbling among yourselves.”* Are there grumblers here today? Jesus has two words for you – Stop it. When people come up to you and start to grumble, don’t listen to them, and repeat the words Jesus said, “Stop grumbling.”

I’d like to read to you the next few verses after where our reading ends today starting with verse 59. Notice what happens with the grumblers and those who just couldn’t accept what was happening:

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” ... {and then jumping down to verse 66} From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.”

Jesus’ words offended people. We touched on this a little last week when we asked if the Jesus we think of is the tolerant Jesus who has a motto of ‘live and let live.’ But note what happens here – Jesus tells the people point blank, “Stop grumbling” and what He said about Himself and their past ways of doing things was so offensive, people left Him. When the going got tough, the weak got going... and just kept going!

So what does this have to do with us today?

Jesus is the Bread of Life. The One who ultimately satisfies. He is the One and only who feeds us with what we really need – the Spirit that brings us to faith and keeps us until the day Jesus comes back to take us Home. And because of that, we have the same options the people of Jesus’ day had:

We can argue with Him, and search in vain for our own ‘bread’ to fill us.

We can decide we're going to rely on ourselves and our past experiences to determine our future, grumbling all the way, even though Jesus Himself said, "Stop it!"

We can say, like so many did, "this is too hard", and leave.

Or we can answer like Peter did, completely surrendering to Him – "Where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

Tomorrow, when that bill shows up in the mailbox, "You provide me with what I need!"

When the grumbler comes up to you, "He has the words of eternal life – stop it!"

When the bottom falls out, "You are the Bread of Life!"

When the promotion at work comes, "You are the one who gives me what I need!"

When the operation is successful, "You are the Mighty One who saves!"

When the future is bright and glorious, "To You, and You alone, be all glory and honor, forever and ever."

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is the one who gives what we need, when we need it. No, that may not always be what we want, and no, it may not always be on our time-table. But it's always exactly what we need, when we need it.

He gives it because He loves us.

He gives it because we need it.

He gives it because of who He is – the One who gives Himself for you; for me; for all who would believe on Him.

Would you pray with me please?

Lord Jesus, You are the only one who satisfies. You are the only one who can give us what we really need. Forgive us for looking at ourselves; at our traditions; at what we are comfortable with instead of what we need – a touch from You to change us, feed us, and keep us. Forgive us for grumbling when things don't go our way. Help us to cling to You and trust You, and give us the strength to use Your own words – 'Stop it; stop grumbling' when we catch ourselves or others going down that path.

Help us to surrender ourselves to You. Help us to surrender all that we have to You – You're the one who gave it to us in the first place!

Thank You for loving us. Thank You for coming to us and giving us what we need, and that's You.

In Your name, Amen.