

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 08/01/2021



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, August 1st

John 6:24-35

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Jesus is the manna!

This week's text continues to unpack the meaning behind last week's feeding of the five thousand. The crowds focus on the wrong bread. Jesus directs them to the bread that endures – the bread that gives eternal life. In the customary manner found in John's Gospel, Jesus does not answer questions directly. The crowd continues to focus on the wrong bread and wrongly connect Jesus with Moses. The final verse is an attempt by Jesus to clarify and reveal Himself as the Bread of Heaven. The crowd's behavior of focusing only on their physical (and perhaps their political) needs is not too far removed from how we relate to Jesus today. Thinking of Jesus in terms of the manna from heaven has some inescapable implications and applications on how we should behave today as Christians in the world if we genuinely want to experience the abundant life on earth promised in John 10:10.

John 6:24-35 Commentary

For context, this text should be read in conjunction with 6:1-23. In addition, later parts of chapter 6 occur in the lectionary over the next three successive Sundays.

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

After the feeding of the five thousand, the crowd saw Jesus go back up the mountain and later how the disciples head out towards Capernaum by boat. The crowds would not have seen Jesus walking on water at night (vv.16-21) and thus assumed Jesus was still in the area. Once they realized Jesus was no longer there, they headed towards Capernaum. They must have reasoned that Jesus would not be separated from His disciples for very long.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

The crowd eventually find Jesus in Capernaum and wondered when he had come there. The last they saw Him He was heading up the mountain on the other side of the lake.

²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking 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 to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."

Jesus does not answer their question but gets right to the heart of the matter. Jesus rebukes the crowd for following Him only because they ate their fill of bread during the miraculous feeding and not because they

recognized the signs of Jesus being the Christ. Jesus admonishes them not to work for the food that perishes, but the food that does not perish, the food that leads to eternal life which the Son of Man will give.

²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

When the crowd ask about the works (plural) of God they must do to obtain the food that leads to eternal life, Jesus responds that the work (singular) of God required is simply to believe in Jesus – the one who God sent. Jesus' status as being the one who God sent into the world is found in many places within John's Gospel (3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 20:21 and multiple references during the High Priestly Prayer 17:1-26). This statement is aligned with the purpose statement of John's Gospel: *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"* (John 20:30-31).

³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

The crowd ask for a sign. They had followed Him in the first place because of healing the sick (v.2) and they had just witnessed the miraculous feeding (v.26). Why another sign? During the miraculous feeding the crowd identified Jesus as the Prophet like Moses (v.14) and thus were expecting a sign on a much grander scale consistent with v.31. Here the crowd talk of the manna which they attribute to Moses (in cooperation with God): *"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you..."* (Exodus 16:4). Moses had supplied manna in the wilderness for forty years thus a one-off lunch was not sufficient. There was also the expectation that God would provide manna again in the messianic age.

³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Jesus insists the manna was not from Moses but God. Turning things to the present, Jesus states God is now giving them the true bread of heaven and then reveals the identity of the true bread of heaven. In v.27 Jesus tells the crowd to work for food that endures to eternal life – here Jesus implies he is the bread that will give eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles (*the world*).

³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

The crowd respond in a way that is similar to the woman at the well to Jesus' promise of the water that will become a spring welling up to eternal life. As the woman wanted this water so that she would never be thirsty again (John 4:14-15), the crowd wanted an ongoing provision of bread to satisfy their hunger.

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

Like the woman, the crowd also misunderstand the true nature of this bread of which Jesus spoke. Therefore, what Jesus implied in v.33 is now explicitly stated. In identifying Himself as the Bread of Life, this is the first *"I am"* statement in John's Gospel (35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5). *"I am"* (*egō eimi*) is the language of divine revelation. In Exodus 3, God desires to send Moses to Pharaoh to bring His people out of Egypt.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God

said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14)

Jesus is the "I AM."

Reflections

The confusion of the crowds in this text reflects the similar confusion of Nicodemus in chapter three where Jesus references a birth beyond a physical birth and the confusion of the woman at the well in chapter four where Jesus references a water beyond a physical water. Here it is a bread beyond a physical bread. This confusion leads Jesus to reveal that this bread is not just from God but that He is the actual bread – the Bread of Life. In doing so, Jesus makes His first "I AM" statement revelations.

On this side of the cross, benefiting from additional revelation of Scripture and the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, we tend to look at the crowds in amazement. They missed the proverbial boat because they were only focusing on physical bread. How could they be so short-sighted? I would hazard a guess that nobody reading this commentary has ever experienced hunger like the crowds in John's Gospel. If we remove hunger and thirst off the table, our behavior, rather inconveniently, seems quite familiar to the crowd.

When the crowd asked, what works were required to gain the bread that endures, Jesus responded: "*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*" (v.29) Our beliefs are reflected in our actions. What do our actions reveal? To what extent do we trust the Lord for our provisions versus spending much of our lives acquiring physical possessions and financial resources? How much effort do we put into seeking to belong in our various social groups or how much time, effort and emotional angst do we spend seeking and maintaining status? What does our prayer life reveal about what we believe and what is important to us?

Some commentators note how the crowd wishing Jesus to perform a sign like Moses did with the manna from heaven was motivated as much by politics as it was by hunger. To the Jews, the gift of Manna would begin again in the messianic age. Immediately after the miraculous feeding (v.14), the crowd began to associate Jesus with the Prophet like Moses. In v.15, we read how Jesus then realized they were about to try and make Him a king. The crowd wanted to use Jesus to overthrow the Romans and their puppet rulers. Having Jesus perform a sign like raining down manna from heaven would identify Jesus as the Messiah. In our day, Jesus is coopted into both rightwing and leftwing political agendas. Are we much different today?

Symbolically thinking of Jesus in terms of the manna from heaven has some immediate implications and applications for our daily lives. First, we are to trust Jesus for our provision on a daily basis and not become concerned by the worldly attitude or mindset of resource scarcity. A reminder of this is in the words our Savior used when He taught His disciples how to pray: "*Give us this day our daily bread (or bread for tomorrow)*" (Matthew 7:11). With manna there was always enough to be satisfied. None could be hoarded. This mindset frees us from the rest of humanity to help humanity. Second, we must seek to be in the presence of God every day. We cannot store up our encounters with God. We cannot forget our spiritual nourishment. Doing Christ's work in the world is not the same as being in the presence of God. We must not confuse doing with being. When we wake up, we must have our allotment of spiritual nourishment for that day, or we go spiritually hungry. We cannot live on moldy leftovers, no matter how nourishing it was at the time. At the same time, we cannot pickup a week's worth of spiritual nutrition at church on Sundays to last the week.