

I don't know about you, but when I was a kid eating a meal at a restaurant, I always looked forward to dessert. Didn't much care about the meal; it was the chocolate cake for me. And, as anyone who knows me would expect, I had a list of favorite places I would recommend we go as a family, knowing that I would get the chocolate cake I wanted.

As I've gotten older, I've actually shied away from large desserts and actually quite prefer just a couple pieces of chocolate before bedtime. Now when I go to a restaurant, I'm really going for the bread. Maybe you know what I mean.

Do you start salivating if I mention the breadsticks at Olive Garden? I mean, who really goes there for the pasta?

What about the brown bread at the Cheesecake Factory or Outback? Highly rated in my latest informal Facebook poll.

Perhaps it's the rolls and honey cinnamon butter from Texas Roadhouse that draw you to that particular restaurant. Since I'm not a meat eater, you better believe I go there for the bread.

And, can one really stop at one basket of Olive Garden breadsticks, one loaf of Cheesecake Factory brown bread, or one basket of Texas Roadhouse rolls? I think not.

We find ourselves this morning in Week 2 of a five-week series hearing verses from John 6 read in worship. Commentaries refer to this stretch of John's gospel as "The Bread Discourse." Last week, we kicked off with one of the most well-known bread stories in the Bible: the feeding of the multitudes. There, Jesus takes what is essentially a young boy's lunch and feeds upwards of ten to fifteen thousand people with baskets of leftovers.

Today's reading picks up with the crowds following Jesus. Jesus isn't surprised, but questions their motives for seeking him out:

“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 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.”

They want more bread, and Jesus’ question is simple: **Which bread do you want? Which bread do you want?**

The crowd, presumably confused, responds with their own question: What do we have to do to get this bread from God? We want some bread.

Jesus answers: “Believe in the one God has sent.”

The crowd replies again: “What sign are you going to give us?”

What sign?! You can almost imagine Jesus, having just fed the multitude, putting the palm of his hand to his forehead in frustration, because they just don’t get it.

Which bread do you want?

Unlike today, with a variety of foods at our disposal, this question is critical to the experience of first century Middle Eastern culture, because bread is the foundational staple to every person's diet. The imagery works, but the crowd is still confused because they believe Jesus is talking about real bread.

Which bread do you want?

I'm stuck on this question, because I'm really starting to believe that what we consume really does shape who we are.

It's a question of diet, not in terms of low-calorie foods or losing weight, but of the quality and quantity of the things we consume.

We live in a society and culture that prioritizes the newest, next best thing. Even if I don't need a new smartphone (or car or computer or *you fill in the

blank*), there's a television commercial or internet advertisement telling me that I do.

We live in a society and culture that conditions us to prefer the disposable over the durable, the single use over the reusable. Shop the aisles of any store if you don't believe me. The truth is still the truth: you get what you pay for. If you think you're getting a deal in life, you're probably going to pay for it.

We live in a society and culture that puts information at our fingertips and gives us the most current news 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And there is nothing about the American news media, regardless of your political persuasion, that is in any way contributing to our health and well-being as individuals, as families, or as a nation.

And, what is perhaps the most egregious of all, we live in a society and culture that, if we aren't careful, defines relationships as temporary and unworthy of our long-term investment.

If what we consume really does shape who we are, which bread do you want?

“Do not work for the food that perishes,” Jesus says, “but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you...For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

As we turn our attention back to the crowd in Jesus’ story, we see that they are in a very similar position to us. All Jesus wants them to do is believe in the bread that endures and gives life to the world.

Essentially, this is really all Jesus ever asks of us. And yet, in the presence of Jesus, the Savior of the world, we still look for nourishment in other places.

The crowd is conditioned to believe that, whatever kind of bread Jesus is offering, not only do they want it, but they must also work for it. Their entire worldview is skewed, even as the answer to all their questions is staring them in the face. More on that in the weeks to come.

And even from a place of great confusion, their request is sincere: **“Sir, give us this bread always,”** to which Jesus responds, **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”**

It is here that the narrative pauses – for now; but we are not excused from answering the question asked of us today: **Which bread do you want?**

Are we going to believe in what Jesus has done for us and what God continues to do for us...and even more faithfully, what God will continue to do for us?

And are we going to live accordingly, seeking nourishment from the only source that matters?

Given the choice, I want to suggest, gently urge, that we change our patterns of consumption toward more of the things that endure and less toward the things that perish.

What endures, you may ask? What are the things that really give us nourishment?

Prayer. Starting our days with prayer means that we begin each day from a place of gratitude that God saw fit to, as I say often, put breath in our lungs and movement in our bodies. We dare not ever take that for granted. Ending our days with prayer means that we can sleep a little more soundly having given whatever burdens our spirits over to God's care. Praying incidentally throughout the day means that we are connecting with God and the needs of ourselves and our neighbors, giving voice to the things that can be manageable with God's help. ***Sir, give us THIS bread always.***

Building Relationships. Want to look for God? Look for people. Whether it's "just showing up" for our family and friends, lending a listening ear to a stranger, or serving our neighbors, the opportunities to show that we do not live independently, rather interdependently, and that we rise and fall, win and lose, succeed and fail together, are abundant. Relationships matter. Good relationships matter. And those take time and effort...but what good things in life don't? ***Sir, give us THIS bread always.***

Worship. Showing up where God promises to be each week on the Lord's Day seems to be culturally unpopular these days. Statistics show that attendance continues to decline across Christian denominations. Why, if God is everywhere, do I need to go to church? I've heard the question often. Anyone that's trying to lose weight by exercising isn't going to the gym once a month, I can tell you that. If we really want to be intentional about growing in our relationship with God and in community with each other, we're going to be here and let God nourish us with the bread that gives life here <the Bible> and here <the Lord's Table>. ***Sir, give us THIS bread always.***

If we believe Jesus is who he said he is, the signs of God in our midst are all around us. And, as you consider your answer to the question "Which bread do you want?," the invitation is there for you:

Come, let us eat for now the feast is spread.

Come, let us eat for now the feast is spread.

Our Lord's body let us eat together.

Our Lord's body let us eat together.