

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. As we prepare to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Easter, we have been addressing the question that Jesus asked His disciples in Matthew 16:15: "Who do you say that I am?" During these forty days of Lent, we are asking ourselves who is Jesus Christ and what is my personal relationship with Him? To help us answer these questions, we are studying the seven "I Am" sayings of Jesus as found in the Gospel of John. In these sayings, Jesus identifies Himself with everyday items of life through which He reveals something about Himself. Last Sunday we discussed Jesus describing Himself as the Light of the World.

This morning lets continue our study of the "I Am" sayings of Jesus in the sixth chapter of John. Before I read this passage, let me first give you some background. Jesus has crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd followed Him because of the miracles that He was performing. The people sat on the hillside as Jesus taught them. It was getting late in the day, so Jesus told the disciples to feed the people. Of course, this caught the disciples by surprise because there were so many people, and they hadn't arranged for a caterer. One of the disciples, Andrew, found a little boy who had five barley loaves of bread and two small fishes.

Andrew took the little boy and his sack lunch to Jesus probably thinking there was no way that this was going be enough to feed such a large crowd; however, remember a little in the hands of the Master is always a lot. So, Jesus took the bread and fish, blessed them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. The Bible tells us that more than 5,000 people enjoyed a satisfying meal with food left over. After Jesus had fed the crowd, He sent the disciples ahead of Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee as He went up the mountain to spend time alone with His Father in prayer. Jesus later followed them walking on the water.

Now the crowd did not see Jesus get into the boat with the disciples, so they assumed that He was still in the same area. So, the next day they came looking for Him on the hillside where He had fed them the day before; however, Jesus was not there, so they continued their search. Our text for this morning picks up the story at this point in verse 24 of the sixth chapter of John. I will be reading verses 24 through 35.

Read John 6:24-35

I found the following short jokes on bread: Why was the baker so grumpy? He woke up on the wrong side of the bread.

When does the bread rise? When you yeast expect it to.

Why was the bread fired from his job? He was loafing around too much.

What did the butter say to the bread? I'm on a roll.

Finally, what did the slice of bread say to the other slice of bread when he saw butter on the table? We're toast.

Have you ever been around a bakery? When Judy and I used to visit our son Jack at Stanford University near San Francisco, we would spend at least one or two nights on Fisherman's Wharf. Near the hotel is the famous bakery for sourdough bread. I enjoyed getting up early and taking walks along the wharf. You could smell the bread baking for blocks. It definitely made you hungry.

As wonderful as freshly baked bread is, in this morning's passage, Jesus offers something better. The crowd that Jesus had fed the day before had come looking for more food. But Jesus encourages them and us today to not only seek food for the body, but to earnestly seek food that satisfies the soul. Here Jesus used a metaphor that we can all understand: "I am the Bread of Life." This is one of the greatest passages in the Gospel of John and also in the New Testament; and it is quite appropriate as a communion text.

Now there are two ways to look at this passage. First, what did Jesus mean when He said: "I am the Bread of Life?" As you study the Gospel of John, you find that there are usually two meanings to Jesus' statements: one on the surface that you can quickly identify with and then there is always a deeper, theological meaning. So, let's look at this statement in detail, taking it step by step starting first with the term "bread." Bread sustains life; it is a basic substance of life. We all realize that if we refuse to eat, we will surely waste away and die; though, to be honest, some of us could use a little wasting away now and then. Bread represents the food that we all depend on for survival; it is bread that gives life.

Now what does Jesus mean by "life" in this phrase? When Jesus refers to life here, He is definitely referring to something more than our mere physical existence, taking up space and using up good air. He is talking about the spiritual life. Jesus is saying that real life is a personal relationship with God, a relationship of trust, obedience and love. This relationship is only possible through Jesus Christ Himself. Apart from Him, there is no relationship with God.

Jesus is more than physical bread; He is the bread that nourishes our soul and our relationship with God. That is to say, without Jesus you may physically exist, but you are not really living life to the fullest as it was intended. As the Bread of Life, Jesus makes life worth living. Each of us was created for a personal relationship with God, and the hunger in our souls will never be satisfied until we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. It is in Jesus that the restless soul finds rest, and the hungry heart is satisfied.

Second, in a way, this passage outlines the stages of the Christian life. First, we see Jesus. We hear about Him from friends and loved ones, from reading passages in the New Testament, from attending Bible studies, and from observing how other Christians live out their daily lives. Next after having seen Him in these various ways, we come to Him. No longer do we regard Him as some distant hero or a character in a book, but now as a friend who is always there for us. And then finally, we believe in Him and accept Him into our hearts. This means that our coming to Jesus is no longer a matter of curiosity, but now one of obedience and acknowledgement that He is indeed our Lord and Savior.

This is the process that gives us the life that Jesus is talking about here. It results in a new and wonderful relationship with God; one that is only possible through Jesus Christ. Without Him it would never be possible. No searching of the human mind or longing of the human heart can ever fully find God apart from Jesus. He came to show us who God is and to re-establish the broken relationship between the Father and His children. This relationship is available to all who will come to Jesus. This life is there for the taking if we are willing to give our hearts to the Bread of Life.

And when we do this, two things happen. First, we find satisfaction in life; the hunger and thirst are gone. The human heart finds what it has been searching for all along, and life ceases to be one of mere existence and becomes something to truly enjoy; it now has meaning. In addition, we have the blessed assurance that when this life on earth ends, we go home to be with the Master Himself. As the Bread of Life, Jesus offers us both life today and life in eternity. This is the joy and peace that we cheat ourselves out of when we refuse His invitation.

Now there are basically two kinds of hunger: there's physical hunger which of course food can satisfy; and then there is a spiritual hunger which no ordinary food can ever satisfy. The people who followed Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Galilee that day were only interested in satisfying their stomachs. They had received an unexpected free meal the day before and now wanted more. However, Jesus was telling them and us today that there is more to life than a good meal. It is as if Jesus is saying to them: "You cannot think about your souls for thinking of your stomach." Have you ever felt like something was missing in your life; that there was a hunger deep inside of you that you could not satisfy? Well, that's what Jesus is trying to tell us in this passage; that He alone can satisfy the hunger of the human heart and soul.

The people in this story were focusing on the wrong type of food. They were worrying about temporary things when they really needed to focus on eternal matters. Jesus tells the crowd and us today to not waste our time and energy striving for food that will spoil but focus on food that sticks with you; food that nourishes your spiritual life; food that makes life worth living; and food that only He can provide.

Before we leave this text, let's look at a couple of other applications to our daily life. In their self-centered desire for more food, the people referred to the manna that God gave their ancestors each day as they traveled across the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land. These people were living on past glories and events in their lives. Many Christians are just like these people living on stale manna. They are thinking about how great things were in the good old days and missing out on the blessings of today. Unfortunately, this not only applies to individuals, but also to many churches today. It is a sure sign that we are out of touch with God if we are talking more about the joys and the good times, we had in the past than what we have today. We are called to live in the present, count our blessings, and live each day to the best of our ability.

In the Book of Exodus, when God gave the Israelites manna, they were told to gather just enough manna for each day; they were not allowed to gather any extra food and store it for later or it would spoil. The lesson for us is that if we are to really live, we must go to the Lord daily. Can we eat enough food today to last us until next Sunday? Can we take in enough air into our lungs this morning to last us for the next week? In the same way, can we store up enough grace for the future? No, we must draw upon God's limitless store of grace each day as we need it. Remember what we just prayed in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." We need to make sure that our soul is fed each and every day as we spend time alone with the Lord in prayer and studying His Word.

Jesus is the Bread of Life; to refuse His invitation is to really miss out on life – life in this world and life in the world to come. You can live on physical, worldly bread, but are you really living or just occupying space? Jesus invites us to look for the eternal food that does not perish. We are created by God in His image, and we will always long for a relationship with Him. Until we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will always be hungry and dissatisfied. When we enter into a personal relationship with Him, then life becomes worth living. How is your relationship with the Lord today? Is it what you want it to be?

This morning the Bread of Life stands before us just as He stood before those questioning people over 2,000 years ago, asking that we believe in Him and never hunger again. The bread He offers is eternal; He offers life beyond death, joy beyond sorrow, hope beyond disappointment, and friendship beyond loneliness. Will you accept His invitation and dine at His table this morning? Come and be filled. Amen