

## Pulling the Curtain Back

10 Pentecost B Aug 1, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

### Gospel: John 6:24-35

<sup>24</sup>When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were beside the sea, they themselves got into the boats & went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. <sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup>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. For it is the Son of Man that God, the Father, has sealed.” <sup>28</sup> Then they said to Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom God has sent.” <sup>30</sup>So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it & believe you? What work are you performing? <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven & gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup>They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” <sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, & whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

### Overview - From Rumbling Tummies to Living Bread

Today’s texts move us from rumbling tummies & flaring tempers to a refocusing on the blessings poured out & the primary benefactor. We see the gifts of God, which come in a variety of ways: physical nourishment, roles & talents lifted up in community, new life given now & into the ages of ages. Yet each of these actions & the gifts mean little if we are not able to see the one who is the giver & to recognize that the gifts are not merely about what we can do to get them or what signs are needed to prove them; rather, it is about trust in God, who is the source of life & living—the one who provides the true bread from heaven. Our role in this story is to tell the history of God’s giving. It is to open our eyes to the way the bread of heaven is sustaining us today, physically & spiritually. We look to the one God sends to us as *the* bread of life. The readings point us to see how a longing for food opens a greater dwelling place for the gifts of faith & promise. From our physical depths we are called to experience a greater spiritual reality.

## Images in the Readings

The most common biblical image for divine mercy is **food**. In Genesis, the plants & trees that God created are given to humans as food. Ancient narratives told of God providing food during famine. The Israelites' memories of their nomadic years recalled a miraculous food, manna, which God sent to keep them alive in the wilderness. Religious rules commanded the faithful to share their food with the hungry & to abstain from eating with the wicked. Disobedience was met with the punishment of famine. The people of Israel themselves were likened to food that God had planted. Food or fast was central to all the primary religious festivals of the Old Testament. Poems described the law of God as if it is nourishing food. Christ was born in Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." In John's metaphoric theology, Christ is the bread of life. We need food to live & Christians have each week served out the word & the sacrament as the food that Christ continues to distribute to those of us who are hungry. Christians need not wonder whether the miracle of the feeding occurred back then; it occurs each week.

### [John 6:24-35](#)

John's discourse does not suggest that the historicity of the manna story is the main point. Rather, it is Christ we are believing in, in whom we place our life's trust. Both the manna & the barley bread of the feeding story become metaphors for Christ & the life he gives. 2 central images from the Old Testament illustrate this Christology. (1) The Son of Man is an eschatological judge, but in John this judge gives food for life. The seal refers to the authorization of an official by the monarch. (2) The manna came not from Moses, but from God, who now gives the manna that is Jesus Christ. Both the Son of Man & the manna are metaphors for Christ. People who think they want food & drink receive instead Christ.

Jesus' miraculous provision of food to the crowd has recalled the gift of manna to the people of Israel in the desert. Yet now he tells them that they are seeking him not because they understand the spiritual meaning of the food, but for another free meal (v. [26](#)). He says: raise your sights above material things, to eternal ones, to what I, "the Son of Man will give you" (v. [27](#)). The Father has shown me to be authentic ("seal"). I will give you nourishment forever. But they have only grasped that the food is miraculous, a work of God, so they ask: how can we do such miracles? (v. [28](#)) Jesus answers: only one "work of God" (v. [29](#)) is essential: to trust in me. Again, they misunderstand; they ask: what proof will you give us? (v. [30](#)). Moses gave us manna from heaven in the wilderness (v. [31](#)); you have only given us earthly food. We expect the Messiah to give us manna again. In v. [32](#), Jesus tries to clear up the misunderstandings: it was God, not Moses who gave you manna; the Father gives

bread now; & manna met physical needs but “true bread” is more than that. Then v. [33](#): Jesus himself is the true bread, the “bread of God”: he “comes ... from heaven & gives life ...”. They still do not grasp that *he* is the bread, Finally, he says: I am the sustenance of life itself, of very existence, for those who trust in me; I will fill their every need.

Yes, they want this bread, & we cannot blame them. Most of us love & appreciate the various breads available from cultures around the world. A slice of sourdough or a handmade tortilla. Seed-crusting simit or a buttery biscuit. But Jesus is not talking about something made of wheat, rye or corn. “I am the bread of life,” he tells them. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry” (v. 35). Jesus is presenting himself as the most basic, durable, & nutritious form of bread available to us. “I am food,” Jesus seems to be saying. “Take me into yourself & you will never be hungry or thirsty or hopeless or powerless. I am the one who comes down from heaven & gives life to anyone in the world — including you.”

When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” he is saying to us, “I am food.” He is saying, “I am the food that brings you forgiveness & new life, the food that brings you to health in body, mind & spirit.” All we need to do is eat this amazing bread, in faith & thanksgiving. At the same time, Jesus also wants us to know that *we* are food. When we eat the bread that is the body of Christ, we are nourished as the community that is the body of Christ in the world today. The bread that Christ offers us is not designed to feed us as individuals. Instead, it is meant to sustain an entire community. Yes, we are food: The body of Christ, the bread of life.

**The recipe to be this very special bread?.....** to be good bread for a hungry world.

**First**, *we are people who believe in Jesus*. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom [God] has sent” (6:28-29) ....to trust in who he was & continues to be & act like he did.

**Second**, *we are adaptable*. The nourishment of bread can be obtained almost anywhere, but it comes in a wide variety of forms from the Bolani bread of Afghanistan to the Malawach of Yemen. If we are going to be bread for a hungry world, we need to be adaptable as well.

**Finally**, *we are durable & nutritious*. As the bread of life, we provide real nourishment when we not only feed the homeless, but sit down with them for conversation over dinner. True belief in Jesus requires acting as the body of Christ in the world. This means being adaptable, durable & nutritious, always looking for ways to nourish a hungry world.