

Pastor's Message – 8/4/15
John 6:24-35

Today's Bible reading is a continuation of our story from last week. Jesus has distanced Himself from the crowd because they wanted to make Him king. During the night, as the disciples are crossing over the Galilee Sea, Jesus comes to them - walking on the water. Noticing now that Jesus and the disciples are missing, the crowd also crosses the lake and finds Jesus at Capernaum. And that's where we pick up the story.

It was the morning after the feeding of the five thousand. Yesterday they ate until they were bursting, but the next morning they were hungry again. They wanted bread, and they knew from experience that Jesus could deliver. Jesus did not give them any more loaves and fish, but instead offered them "bread of life." But what does that mean to a person who has not eaten since yesterday? Jesus knew they were hungry, but he wanted them to acknowledge a deeper hunger. We need to be fed with more than bread. We need "soul food."

That can be hard to wrap our heads around. Big Macs and Snickers we understand, but metaphors can be too abstract; we may miss the point. The people Jesus addressed in John 6 didn't get it either. He talked about the bread of life, and they wanted a concrete sign -- like when Moses gave food to their Hebrew ancestors in the wilderness -- real food, food they could actually hold and smell and taste and eat. But Jesus reminded them that it wasn't actually Moses who fed them. God had fed them, and food from God nourishes more than just the stomach. It feeds the souls of people lost in the wilderness. It goes past a rumbling stomach to the true emptiness in our lives.

We live in a culture that says, "Show me; prove it." Not so different then. The crowd that we hear about in our Bible reading today is the same way. They want evidence. They want to be in control of their faith. They are asking, "What can Jesus do for us?" They would fit right in to churches today where some people are asking for hard evidence for the existence of God, wondering how we can "prove" that Jesus is God's son or that he was resurrected from the dead, and why they should give "their" money to an organization that looks shaky on a fairly regular basis. How can we make sense of faith in a world where fact is given more credence than anything that cannot be proven?

Much of our culture struggles as the crowd did then, wondering "how do we know for sure?" But Jesus is clear -- what counts is not

proof, but believing. Not money-back guarantees, but faith. Not only does our culture expect proof and not find it, but more than that, Jesus himself can be difficult to swallow. His hard sayings and tough teaching are hard to take. “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28).

Jesus can stick in our throats, no doubt about it.

He would be so much easier to digest if he said, “Love your *friends*, do good to those who *like* you, bless those who *compliment* you, pray for those who *help* you.” Yes, but if Jesus said these things, he would be feeding us spiritual candy bars, doughnuts, and French fries — food that isn’t bad in moderation but can hurt us if we overeat it.

And Jesus certainly doesn’t let us snack on the tasty morsels of sin that are always sitting so deliciously in front of us. He won’t let us say, “Well, I’ll taste a little revenge, just this once,” or “I’ll have a helping of unfaithfulness, but just a spoonful” or “I’ll have some of that irresistible gossiping, just a mouthful, but no more.”

To all of this, Jesus says, “No. Put down the spoon, push the plate away and get up from the table.” In an ethical and moral Christian life, some of this stuff we want to feast on is just bad for us. It will cripple us or even kill us. And Jesus knows it.

Jesus wants to feed us the good stuff, the food that endures for eternal life.

Let’s talk a little more about the stuff that’s not so good for us. Are you crazy for cheese curls? Passionate about popcorn? Nuts about nuts?

What you snack on, believe it or not, says a lot about who you are.

A man named Alan Hirsch was the neurological director of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. He had eight hundred volunteers take personality tests and then asked them to name their favorite snacks. The results, reported in the journal *Alternative Medicine* (May 2007), were astounding. People who share a personality type choose the same snack 95 percent of the time.

If you prefer:

Tortilla chips: You’re a perfectionist. You’re successful and ambitious, and you like to plan ahead. You have a strong sense of social responsibility and abhor injustice.

Pretzels: You’re the life of the party. You love novelty and can quickly become bored with routine. You tend to start new projects before completing existing ones.

Cheese curls: You have a high sense of morals and ethics, and you insist on treating everyone fairly. You might seem uptight, but you're highly organized and methodical.

Popcorn: You're a take-charge type but with a modest, low-key demeanor. Confident but reserved, you would make a large charitable donation without telling anyone.

Nuts: You're even-tempered, easy to get along with and highly empathetic. Your easygoing, cooperative nature contributes to success at home and at work.

Potato chips: You're achievement-oriented, successful, and competitive. You're a natural leader but can be easily irritated with inconveniences such as long lines and traffic jams.

Crackers: You're contemplative, thoughtful, and often a loner. You prefer private time and shy away from confrontation and arguments; you can't stand hurting another person's feelings.

Meat snacks (such as beef jerky): You're gregarious and generous, and you tend to be loyal to a fault.

While this link might sound like a stretch, Hirsch says it makes perfect sense — biologically. "Food preferences reside in the olfactory lobe," he says, "the same part of the brain where the personality resides."

You are what you munch.

Last week I posed the question "What are you hungry for?" This week I'd like to suggest that too often, what we're hungry for, isn't good for us.

So, if we want to avoid the food that's not so good for us, how do we become better eaters? The people of the crowd say to Jesus, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?" (v. 30). They fail to see that Jesus has already given them a sign by multiplying the loaves and fishes. Instead, they review the history of God's work in their lives by saying, "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (v. 31).

Jesus cannot believe that they're missing the good food that's standing right in front of them. He shakes his head and says, "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. "The bread that God gives is the one who came down from heaven to give life to the world." (vv. 32-33).

“I’m the bread of God,” says Jesus. The good stuff. Part of a perfectly balanced spiritual diet that gives new and everlasting life. Yes, the law was given through Moses, just like the manna that was given to the people of Israel in the wilderness. But now grace and truth are coming through Jesus Christ, the bread of God.

Slowly, slowly, the lights begin to come on. The people are starting to get it, so they say, “Sir, give us this bread always” (v. 34).

We shouldn’t be surprised at this. It can be a challenge to improve eating habits — to turn away from spiritual junk food and turn toward the food that endures for eternal life. Jesus invites us to refocus our attention and see him as “the true bread from heaven” (v. 32), the one who comes down from heaven to give life to the world. He also invites us to believe in him and trust him to fill us with his grace and his truth.

Seeing and believing. These are the actions that enable us to connect with Jesus in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, when we come to the table to eat the meal that he has prepared. We see the bread that is broken for us, an outward and visible sign of Jesus’ inward, invisible grace. We *believe* that Jesus is present with us, offering his grace and his truth, his forgiveness, and his strength.

This is the good stuff: the food that endures for eternal life. If we’ve been given a warning about bad food today, then we need to hear some words of encouragement and instruction about good food as well. “I am the bread of life,” says Jesus to the crowd, and to each of us. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (v. 35).

The Bread of Life nourishes the soul. It richly provides all that we need to live in a faithful relationship with God. Knowing Jesus and inviting Him into our hearts and our lives will fill us with humility, patience, gentleness, love, forgiveness, and peace (Ephesians 4:2-3). These are the qualities which we see in Jesus. These are the essential ingredients which make up the Bread of Life. The Bread of Life is absolutely essential for our spiritual health.

Believe in Jesus:

The bread that God gives (v. 33).

The bread that gives life (v. 35).

Living bread (v. 51).

The body of Christ.

That’s the food that can keep us healthy and growing in our faith.