

Lenten Midweek 1, 2011

Text: John 6:36-40

Title: Bread of Life

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“Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our Faith.”

When you look at Jesus, what do you see? What does Jesus look like?

Seven times in the gospel of John, Jesus paints a picture of Himself. He shows us what He looks like. Seven times Jesus says, “I am.” “I am the Good Shepherd.” “I am the door.” “I am the vine.”

Today, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.”

Bread is not a luxury. Bread is not dessert or a feast or a delicacy. Bread is everyday. Bread is basic nourishment.

Most every culture on earth has some sort of bread- from pita to tortilla to naan- breads with yeast, breads without yeast, maybe some soda bread for St. Patrick’s Day.

When I was in the Australian outback, I had damper, which is a bread baked in the coals of the fire. They also had something in Australia they called “fairy bread.” This was slices of white bread that had been buttered, and then covered with colored sprinkles. It was usually reserved for little kids’ birthday parties.

Bread isn’t just for holidays and special occasions, bread is the substance of your every day life.

Too many folks treat Jesus like a dessert or a delicacy, something for special occasions like a big holiday feast.

That’s not Jesus. Jesus is there to stave off starvation.

To live without Jesus is to live without bread. To live without Jesus is to die eternally.

Jesus does not just give bread. Jesus does not just provide bread. “No thanks, Jesus, none for me today, I’ve got my own.”

Jesus is bread, in a very physical way. Jesus went on to say, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Wow! Jesus can’t be serious, can He? “How can this man give us His flesh to eat,” said the Jews.

To which Jesus replied, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”

That’s it. Jesus or death. Bread or no bread. There’s no other option. There’s no wiggle room. No way to bargain yourself out.

You can’t argue with starvation. You can’t will yourself to live and not eat. You can’t eat things that aren’t food and expect to survive.

Those are your options, Jesus or death.

It’s a hard teaching, and most people don’t agree with Jesus on this point. In fact, after Jesus started saying these things, the crowds stopped following Him and most of the disciples left.

Most people would rather have a more extensive menu with more choices than just bread or no bread. But that’s what Jesus gives.

Jesus gives what we need for eternal life. And what you need is Jesus Himself, His very flesh and blood.

So if Jesus is the bread of life, how do we eat this bread? How do we receive His gift of life?

The key is Jesus’ words. Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.”

The Spirit gives life. Spirit is breath, breath is life. The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. Breath is spirit, is life.

Breath carries words. No breath, no words. Spirit is breath is words is life.

God’s Spirit, God’s breath is borne by God’s words, bringing everlasting life.

To have such life is faith. Faith is not a decision or an emotion or knowledge. Faith is receiving the gift of life, depending on God for all things.

When Jesus asks the twelve if they are going to leave, Peter says, “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the holy one of God.”

Jesus’ words give eternal life. Those who have been enlivened acknowledge and trust their life-giving God.

And that life is nourished and sustained by God’s word. You can’t say, “Well, I’m alive now, I guess I can stop eating.” Nonsense. You continue to eat.

And Jesus has a strange way of feeding you. You eat with your ears. You heard me. You eat with your ears. You are fed by hearing.

Jesus feeds you, He gives you His life-giving Spirit as you hear His words. The word bears the Spirit, the Spirit, the breath of God, gives you life.

Sometimes the Lord engages other parts of you, but your ears are always involved.

In Holy Baptism, the Lord uses water, but always enlivened by His Word. “How can water do such great things?” “Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with faith, which trusts this word of God in the water.”

And in the Lord’s Supper, the Lord uses bread and wine, but always enlivened by His Word. “How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?” “Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking are the main thing in the sacrament.”

The bread of life you receive in the Lord’s Supper is the body of Christ, because it has been enlivened by God’s Spirit through the word. Even here you do not just eat with your mouth, but also with your ears.

So Jesus is bread, bread that gives life, eternal life. In fact, it’s the only source of eternal life there is. But you eat it by faith as you hear His words, and as His Spirit works in you.