

Hungry For More

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John 6:22-35

FPC Uvalde
Aug. 2, 2009

Prayer of Illumination:

Loving God, you have made us that we cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from your mouth. Give us a hunger for your Word, and in that food satisfy our daily need; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are back in the 6th chapter of John again this Sunday talking about the Bread of Life. Last week, Jesus multiplied five barley loaves and two fish to feed a multitude of people—over 5000. Well, once the folks Jesus fed got their bellies full, they started remembering that they were promised a prophet, a messiah who would rescue them and be their new king. Jesus got wind of this and took off, not wanting to be known only for the signs or miracles he performed.

So, Jesus left and went up to the mountain. The disciples left and got into their boat to cross the sea into Capernaum. Jesus walked on the water and the disciples finally recognized Jesus for who he was—the Divine Son of God.

I asked you the question last week “What are you hungry for?” This week I would like to suggest that what we are often hungry for is often not really what is good for us.

I could be a serious junk-food junkie if I would allow myself to be. I can get into a bag of potato chips or cheetos like nobody’s business. I love chocolate and cookies, popcorn from the Movie Theater, and, well, you get the idea.

As I was doing research for this week’s sermon, I read an article that was talking about junk food, and how “what you snack on says a lot about who you are.” In an article in *Alternative Medicine*, titled “Message in the Munchies,” (May 2007) it said that if you like

Tortilla chips you’re a perfectionist.

Pretzels—you’re the life of the party

Popcorn—You’re the take-charge type

Potato chips—you’re achievement-oriented

Crackers—you’re contemplative

Meat snacks (such as beef jerky)—you’re gregarious and generous.

The article said that while this may seem like quite a stretch, it really isn't, and makes perfect sense—biologically. “Food preferences reside in the olfactory lobe [of the brain]—the same part of the brain where the personality resides.”

I guess you could say you are what you munch.

When it comes to junk food, I'd guess most of you have experienced that hunger that seems to follow on its heels, or the crash of energy that comes once the sugar rush is over.

For me, it seems like—and this can go for a good healthy meal as well as for junk food—there are times when I have eaten till I am full, but I am still not satisfied.

Well, in our lesson for today, we have some other serious junk food junkies. They had a bad case of the munchies and wanted more. They had been fed as much as they wanted and now they were hungry for more.

That's the problem with miracles, you see. These miracles that Jesus performed were like junk food. They didn't last. He fed them bread and they were hungry again the next morning. He healed the paralytic, but even the paralytic grew old and died. He turned the water into wine, but the next wedding, they still needed wine for the guests. This is why the gospel writer John called them signs and not miracles, because they were not for the purpose of showing off Jesus' power, but to point to the higher reality of the glory of God. Miracles are tricky because they are here, and they are wonderful and they give us exactly what we need for the moment—but then they disappear.

Jesus doesn't want us to just snack on the miracles he performs. He knows that we will be hungry again the next day. But you know—sometimes what he *does* want us to chew on is not always as tasty as these junk food miracles, are they.

Jesus said, “Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you.” “If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other one also. From anyone who takes your coat, do not even withhold your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” *Luke 6:27-30*.

Those words don't go down quite as smoothly as a nice creamy piece of Ghirardelli chocolate, do they? Jesus doesn't let us snack on the nice tasty morsels of sin. He doesn't say you can have just one bite of that juicy gossip you heard last week, or

just a little taste of revenge won't hurt. He doesn't teach us that just one spoonful of dishonesty—if it's a white lie, that is okay.

He knows junk food is bad for us, and he wants to give us something else. He wants to give us bread that will last. He wants to give us *The Bread of Life*--The miracle that will never go away and never leave us hungry again.

The crowd is stuck on the literal meaning of bread, though. Bread was the staff of life in biblical times. It was a daily occurrence for women to grind the grain, to make the dough and bake the bread. Bread was even a more common substance than it is today. For this reason, bread was used as a metaphor throughout the Bible for many different things. In 2 Thess., bread is referred to as earning a living (which we still use—I need some dough). In Isaiah, bread is referred to as the word of God. And in John, bread is referred to as the true bread from heaven. Bread was a common word and carried with it the understanding that all people needed bread to exist. Bread is a part of life and bread prolongs life. Do you see the layered meaning here in John's words? The literal bread is what we need to physically live, and the Bread of Life, come down from heaven, and is what we must have to nourish our spiritual lives.

When the crowd saw Jesus again they asked: "When did you come here?" They were anxious for some more of the life prolonging bread. Jesus had a way of seeing through people's words, though, didn't he, and straight into folk's hearts. Jesus realized that their motivation for seeking him out was not the sign he had performed yesterday—the sign that was intended to point to the glory and greatness of God--but their motivations was their once full, and now empty bellies. And he tells them as much. Basically he said I know why you are here—you want more to eat!

Because they have focused on the *wrong* bread, Jesus redirects them toward the food that will last forever. *Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*

The crowd misses the point once again and focuses on what they must *do*—what *work* they must perform to get this food. They focus on what *they* must do rather than on what GOD is doing right in front of their eyes.

They ask for a sign that will make their belief easier. Give us magical bread like God gave our ancestors in the desert. They knew about the manna in the desert their

ancestors received and they wanted a visible sign, too—something that would make their faith a little easier.

Magic is always easier than faith. Junk food is way easier to pick up at the convenience store than cleaning and cutting up fresh fruits and veggies. But even the manna in the desert was only good for one day, wasn't it? Even the manna was not food for eternal life.

Jesus was trying to relate to this crowd in a radically new way. They wanted literal answers to their questions; Jesus wanted to point them to the truth of God's revelation. He was trying to relate to people who insisted on viewing their world according to the traditions they grew up with. That's pretty natural, I would say. He does signs for them, but not the kind they are looking for. He did fill their bellies with food to eat, but the real food Jesus wanted them to have seemed beyond their grasp. It was just not something they could wrap their heads around. Jesus just didn't seem to be playing by the Torah rulebook they had known all their lives—in fact—he was putting down the Judeo-Christian work ethic—the ethic we live by today. He told them they could not work for *this* bread!

The Moses-style of bread said, *don't be freeloaders, don't live off others, and earn your own way*. That sounds like our own parents or what we as parents have said to our kids, doesn't it? Our *rules of life* are comfortable because they are predictable.

But when Jesus gives *himself* to us in this way—I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE—FEAST ON ME AND NEVER BE HUNGRY—he smashes all predictable, comfortable rules we know of. We have what we have because we earned it. We worked hard and got far in life. We followed the rules and were rewarded. We trust in those standards, and you'll have to admit, when we run across somebody that doesn't hold these same standards, we have a hard time trusting them.

That is where these folks in our lesson were today. Jesus was talking about something that was way outside of everything they knew to be right, to be "legal," and to fit in their rule book. But a point I want to make here is that God's generosity is not dependent upon our virtue. We can follow the rules all we want, but God's generosity is based on **GOD'S** goodness—not ours.

It all seems so complex, the crowd must've been thinking. And I would even venture to guess some of you here today may be thinking the exact same thing—*what in the world is she talking about!!!* Ambiguity is troubling, isn't it? We want concrete, literal, and secure answers to our questions. But, my friends, I am sorry to tell you; we will not always get concrete, literal answers when it comes to our faith.

Most of us know things on the basis our past experiences and our previous concepts. We “make sense” of things by making things fit within the pattern of what is already known. Have you ever heard or said yourself, “what in the world is that?” Notice you framed your question within the world around you, the world you know.

So when we—along with the crowd in the text today—try to make sense of Jesus, the eternal Word, Son of God, Light of the World—with God, as God, within the framework of our world, we will fail.

But maybe, the one who befuddles and confuses us so much is also the one who interprets and explains. Amid all the confusion and misunderstanding, there is one who stands with us, who patiently keeps teaching us, who doesn't stop loving us despite our incomprehension.

Maybe comprehension is not the point. It didn't seem to matter to Jesus that the crowd didn't understand. He still fed them, he still loved them, and he kept on teaching them.

Maybe the point is to allow Jesus—“the one who has come down from heaven; the bread of life—to keep working with us, to keep surprising us.

So what if you don't fully understand Jesus this morning! So what if you don't understand my sermon! The point is that you are here, in the very presence of God—the “one come down from heaven.” The point is—if you have to have one—is presence.

In a few moments, we will taste this bread of heaven as we share the Lord's Supper together. We will eat the cracker and drink the juice because they are something we can relate to—they are of our world. But those crackers, lovingly made by Laura and that Welch's grape juice are just like the junk food signs the people were hungering for. They are merely signs that point us to another reality—the *spiritual* presence of Christ with us here today. As we take the bread and drink the juice may your eyes be opened, may you see the face of Jesus and feast of the eternal Bread of Life. Amen.