

Our Daily Bread

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John 6:35: 41-51

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I'll bet we've all heard that old catch 22 situation before. You can't get a job unless you have experience, and you can't get any experience if you don't have a job! We have been taught that in order to get experience, we must have first hand, hands-on knowledge of something.

Well, actually that is not so much the case any more, what with the electronic age, and the multitude of experiences we can have through our computers, our cell phone or a video game player.

Our world has become full of seekers—experience seekers. We (well, I don't) go bungee jumping, go skydiving or go on eco-vacations—to have new experiences—to experience first hand how things work or how things feel. We are living in a post-modern world where perceptions of things and experiences of events in our lives are viewed through a different set of lenses. They are viewed through this new post-modern set of eyes, which wants to experience. It's not enough to “be alive” any more—we want to “feel alive.”

In an article on why post-moderns go to church, I read that “if we think that people are going to pull themselves out of a warm bed on Sunday morning to come to church because they are drawn there by a ‘quest for meaning,’ in their lives, I will find myself preaching to rows of empty pews” (*Bread of Life Presence*, Homiletics, 8/7/1994).

It's not a quest for meaning that the current generation is looking for. They are looking for, are seeking, and are hungry for an **experience. --An experience of presence.**

It is this hunger for the experience of presence that draws people to look for the spiritual in all different sorts of places. New Age spirituality has a very wide range options—crystals, tarot cards, and channeling. People will sit in sweat lodges on a Native American reservation for hours hoping to find a sense of the spiritual in their lives. And they may—it is not my job or intention to tear down any one else's practices.

But, at the end of the day, are these experience seekers, these New Age formulas that which are lasting and true? For Christians, the answer is simple, it is no.

Our lesson today promises to give us these real-life experiences—these “alive” experiences. Jesus promises to give us each day our daily bread—our substance for life—our daily experience of the divine.

The problem we so often have, though is how do we recognize it when we’ve got it? I have heard so many people say that they just wish Jesus would tell them the answer to this decision or that. Or “How do I really know if I just had an experience with Jesus and that it wasn’t just a good feeling I had?”

Well, I cannot give you definite answers to those questions, but I can tell you some things to think about when you are trying to recognize the Bread of Life come down from heaven. On those days when Jesus Christ may just be sitting at your kitchen table during breakfast, or in the passenger seat of your car as you are driving. There are things to look for!

1. Whatever the situation is, it will be **life affirming/life giving**. Just as the bread is life giving, our encounters with Jesus will always be life affirming. Jesus said I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly. If you have just come out of a situation and said to yourself, “I don’t really feel very good about how I handled that, or I wish we all hadn’t gotten into that squabble over something so stupid.”—Then it probably was not a divine encounter with Christ. Our encounters with Christ will be life affirming.

2. Our encounters with Christ will be **intimate**. Jesus said that the bread he gives is his flesh!!! That sounds rather cannibalistic, doesn’t it? We might as well go ahead and talk about that, since there have been critics throughout the ages who have put down Christianity saying we eat the flesh of Christ. It’s a METAPHOR!

It’s a metaphor for being so intimate with Christ that we take him inside of us, like we would bread. We chew on his words, we ingest his love, and his goodness and grace becomes part of who we are as we digest his lessons for us.

The Christian faith is not just about a set of beliefs and a list of intellectual facts and doctrines that must be followed. The Christian faith is about being encountered intimately by Jesus Christ, it is about knowing Jesus in a personal and intimate way.

Christianity is not a “spiritual” religion, like some of the new age religions might be classified. Christianity is an “incarnational” religion. The word *incarnate* means to literally

put on flesh, an embodiment of flesh. Jesus takes up space here today. We would love to see these pews full of humans, but my friends, these pews are full!

Jesus doesn't just take up space, but Jesus shows up in some of the most unlikely, unexpected places. Have any of you read the book *Traveling Mercies* by Anne LaMott? It is a wonderful book—a memoir—about how the author found Christ in her life. Anne was an alcoholic and a drug abuser and was at the point in her life where she was really scraping the bottom of the barrel.

There is one scene in the book, and even though it has probably been 15 years that I read it, I can still remember. Anne is actually sitting in the corner, on the floor of her bedroom as she is going through horrible, terrible withdrawal from the drugs and the alcohol. Through her sobs and tears, she looks up and sees Jesus Christ standing there beside her. In her stupor and misery, there was Christ, just ready to pounce on her with love and comfort.

Christ becomes bread—bread for our worst of hungers, bread for our daily life.

3. A third mark of the daily presence of bread from heaven—of Christ in our lives is that there will always be a sense of mystery to it. God will always be beyond our ultimate comprehension.

You know—one of the best ways to describe God is to say what God is not. God is not prejudice. God is not evil. God is not a man. God is not a woman. What we can say about God is that God is a mystery.

One of the greatest mysteries we encounter in God through Christ, I believe is grace. How are we *ever* worthy enough to receive the huge amounts of grace each one of us gets every day? The answer is that we are not. We are not worthy of God's grace, and that's what makes it such a mystery when we continually receive it!

Jesus tells us we only have to believe. "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life." Even our belief—our faith is a gift from God.

Faith is a major focus of this text today, and Jesus makes it clear when he says that we must first be "drawn by the Father who sent me."

Our faith, you know, is not totally our choice. I believe we do have some say in it, but ultimately it is **God** who draws us to our faith. We are here today, because God moved in our lives and called us here to this place today.

The word “drawn” in verse 44, in the Greek, is the same word used to describe the act of dragging in fishing nets into a boat or up onto the shore. Can you picture a wet, heavy, fish-laden net? Picture that net being drug into the boat, onto the shore—probably not without a little effort. That is the same way God has to get many of us to our faith—as wet, heavy, burden-laden people.

God draws us to faith in much the same way those fish are drawn in on the nets. God does not merely beckon or ask us, God draws us in. The drawing that is spoken of in this passage indicates a very powerful—I might even say irresistible action. To be sure, we resist and struggle against it at times, but in the end our resistance is ineffective. It is in that sense that we talk about God’s irresistible grace. We can’t resist it even if we try!

And I know—I have tried! I have shared with several of you some of the resistance I was dishing out while I was feeling those nudges from God to go into ordained ministry. I kinda put it off, and said, Okay, God, I will go to seminary to be ready, but I’m not too sure what your are thinking when you think you are calling me to be a pastor. Those nudges became irresistible, though, and as sure as you see me standing here in front of you, you can believe that God drew me in.

“Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life” (vs. 47). Jesus didn’t say you *will* have eternal life, Jesus says you have it now. Jesus is our *daily* bread. God draws us in each and every moment, and Jesus waits—ready to fill us with an abundance of that mysterious grace.

“I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (vs. 35). If you believe in me, your life will never be without meaning and purpose.

I invite you to hear these words afresh and new today. Hear these words, chew them up and digest them. Let Christ become part of you and you part of him.

Amen.