

John 6:25-35

“I am: the Bread of Life”

Before I read the Scripture, I need to set the scene for us all. There are only two miracles that are reported in all four Gospels. The resurrection of our Lord, Jesus, and the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. Our “I am” statement this morning takes place after the latter, according to John. Jesus and his disciples are near the Sea of Galilee where a large crowd has gathered because of the notoriety that Jesus of Nazareth was gaining. As it got late in the day, one of the disciples realized that there was nowhere nearby to get food.

Even if you have never been to church, you have most likely heard this story. Jesus is given five loaves of bread and two fish and feeds all the people there, with baskets left over. In John’s Gospel we are told that, soon after, Jesus senses that some other people are coming to take him by force. He sends his disciples in a boat to the other side of the sea – to Capernum. He then retreats to the mountains to pray.

It is important for us to know that the people there saw all of this happen. They saw the disciples leave without Jesus and saw him go away alone. What they did NOT see was Jesus walking across the water in the night when the disciples were battling a storm. Nor did they see Jesus call Peter out of the boat for a little water-walking with him. All they knew was that, by morning, Jesus was also in Capernum. Not understanding the logistics but wanting more bread, many of the people who had just been fed got into boats themselves and crossed to the other side to find him. This is where our story picks up. I’ll begin reading at verse 25.

READ PASSAGE

Now, many of us may wonder what in the world this has to do with us today. But the truth is that crowds are crowds. Whether they are following Jesus, watching a soccer game, gathered for worship in a church or at a rock concert, there are certain characteristics that will be present in every crowd. A crowd is a group of people united by a common ideology, belief or ideas but are usually anonymous to some or most of the others there. Because a crowd denotes a large number of people, they are usually highly emotional and their emotions are contagious. Crowds also make us very susceptible to suggestions.

Do you remember last year when I told the story about how the teenagers used to sway in the balcony during the hymns and make me laugh? Well, on graduation Sunday they stood at the front of the church in their caps and gowns and, during the last hymn, started swaying. Soon the choir began to sway with them and before I knew it, the whole church was swaying. This is VERY un-Presbyterian but certainly illustrates crowd mentality!

Well, the same thing happened here, according to John. The people were hungry and Jesus fed them. But as the crowd began to discuss what had happened, their emotions started to carry them away. I imagine that, in the space of a few short hours, the story got more and more fantastic because soon excitement for this Jesus was at an all-time high!

On the first go around, the story was probably told with certain accuracy. But over time, the story may have gone from a hungry crowd to one that was nearly on death's door, starving and from being fed with five loaves of bread to manna, falling from Heaven, as in the day of Moses. Now the crowd has grown, and they are hungrier than ever. And their reactions to being fed in such an unexplainable way lead Jesus to realize certain things about them that can be true about us as well.

First of all, the crowd was made up of seekers. And so are we. Isn't that why we are here today? We are seeking, - the Word, fellowship, opportunities for service. But what was the crowd seeking that day? Well, Jesus understood that many of them were seeking the wrong things. Some were seeking another meal so they would not have to earn their own way. They saw a handout in the works and they were going to take advantage of it. Follow this guy Jesus and you won't have to fish or harvest or hunt. He just gives out lunch!

Some were seeking because of the sensationalism that Jesus' actions were causing. Healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, demons being sent into herds of pigs. After all, who would NOT be curious about these things? It's just human nature. I often wonder as I wait my turn in the grocery line, how those tabloids can write what they do and not get sued? After all, if they *are* true, Jennifer Aniston is constantly pregnant, the princesses in England are mortal enemies and no marriage in Hollywood lasts more than 37 days! But just by the fact that I have READ all these headlines while waiting, we have to assume people actually buy the magazines!

Jesus wants us to come to him because we are seeking God. We are seeking to be fed the truth about the grace and love that God offers us freely when we accept Jesus as our Savior. But grace is a funny thing, isn't it? In our world of "Because I'm worth it" and "You get what you pay for", it is sometimes hard to accept things that are just given to us. We wonder what the catch is.

A Sunday School teacher wanted to be sure that her class understood the concept of grace that she had been teaching. That it is a gift, freely given. So she asked them, "If I sell my big house and my nice car and give all the money to poor people, will that get me into Heaven?" "No!" the class answered. "Well, if I come up here to church every day and mow the lawn and clean the whole building, will that get me into Heaven?" Again they shouted NO. So she asked,

“Well, then, how DO I get to heaven?” The class sat in silence for a few seconds and then a thoughtful first grader said, “You gotta’ be dead first!”

When the people in the crowd do not understand the grace that is being offered, we discover the second thing Jesus learned about this crowd. They don’t understand who Jesus is. We know this because, when Jesus doesn’t immediately feed them, they start to question him. To wonder who he really is. They even ask for a sign to prove that he is a miracle worker. After all, **THEY WANT MORE BREAD!** The contagion of the crowd grows as they talk about Moses and the children of Israel and so they ask for Jesus to feed them day and night, as Moses did.

Jesus recognizes their misconception and tells the people there, “It was not Moses who gave them food but my Father in Heaven.” He goes on to explain that God gave everything God has to Jesus so he could give it to them. But they are only concerned with their immediate needs and not their eternal needs. Jesus tells them all that the bread they seek is perishable. It will only last for a while. But that he can give them something that will last forever.

And again, this could easily be us. In our world of free overnight shipping, Amazon Prime, Venmo me the money and just put it in the microwave, we too often seek what we want **WHEN** we want it, rather than waiting for God’s timing on something that could be better. We seek the immediate rather than the eternal. They do not know who Jesus is and therefore do not trust him to know their needs, nor do they take the time to really know Jesus.

One of my favorite quotes is an Arabian proverb that says, “If God answered the prayers of dogs, it would rain bones”. Faith calls us to believe that God provides for us in just the right way at just the right time. That way, when we ask for things that are not for our good and God’s glory, we do not receive them. That is why we pray each week in the Lord’s Prayer: give us this

day our *daily* bread. Jesus didn't tell us to pray for a whole month's worth! If we trust not only in God but in God's timing, we can be assured that God will take care of us.

Finally, Jesus understands that the crowd is seeking in the wrong way. You see, they are seeking half-heartedly. If we had the time to read the rest of John 6, we would learn that many of the followers, when they heard him offer the bread of life, understood and gave God their hearts. But just as many left, grumbling. They wanted *what* they wanted, *when* they wanted it and were not willing to change their expectations. They went away hungry.

This is also something we have in common with the crowd that day. When we seek with the wrong motives in mind, we do not receive the gifts that God offers. Those following Jesus that day were willing to give a little of their time if it would earn them good, but they were not willing to give themselves or their hearts.

Jesus points out that they cannot work for the things that God will give them – God gives to us out of God's grace and love. All they have to do is bring believing hearts to God and God will fill them to the brim! But before we judge the crowd too harshly, has anyone here ever tried to bargain with God for what we think we need? Or prayed because you know you should but not really because you expected God to answer? We, too, can seek in a way that shows that we trust more in ourselves than in God's plan for our lives. We can seek half-heartedly.

So when we, like the crowd, seek the wrong things for the wrong reasons in a half-hearted way, we will go away empty. Even when Jesus has offered to fill us. Jesus then says, "I am the bread of life." Jesus told them that if they accepted THIS kind of bread, they would never be hungry or thirsty. That once a child of God gives Jesus their whole heart, that God will never let go of them. What a promise! But the crowd did not understand what this meant and still wanted to just fill their bellies.

Friends, Jesus offered us this “I am” saying so that we could all understand that God wants us to seek him where he can be found. In Jesus Christ. That God want us to seek him for ourselves, out of our recognition that we need God in our lives. And that God wants us to seek him with our whole heart.

And I can’t help but wonder if Jesus hoped they would take note of the exact words that he used. It is an important fact about the “I am” statements that I have alluded to but not explained clearly. This was obviously a crowd of Jews, well acquainted with the stories that had been handed down about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Of the greatest prophet of all, Moses, and all that God had offered them through his life.

So perhaps, Jesus was hoping that someone would take note of the fact that, hen Jesus tells us “I am”, he uses the very same word that God gave Moses when he called him to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses asked God, “Who shall I say sent me?” God said, “Tell them the God of your ancestors sent me”. Moses then said “But what if they want to know your name? What shall I say to them?” God replied, “Tell them I am who I am.”

But in their selfishness and concern for the immediate, the crowd that day completely missed what Jesus said. And I do not want THIS crowd to miss it. When God said, “I AM” it is translated into Hebrew as Yahweh. But what it really means is this: “I am who I am and I was who I was and I will be who I will be.” This is the word that Jesus used in each of his “I am” statements.

It is important today as THIS CROWD comes to the Table today, that we do not miss the point. The bread that we eat today reminds us that the God who was and is and is to come meets us at the table. That he offers the bread of life – ETERNAL life – so that when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we will remember that we will never be hungry again.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”. God calls us to hunger and thirst for things that will fill our hearts and minds and souls. We find it in the life, death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And we receive it for all time. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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