

John 6:35, 41-51

If you read the very next line in this passage, they are at the synagogue there in Capernaum. I was actually standing in the ruins of that very synagogue...what a gift to be able to experience God as physically REAL!!!

Bread and water are also so very REAL and Physical...I never really realized how important Bread and Water were to Jesus' audience until I spent some time in the middle east. Every meal we shared involved bread and water...and I never drank so much water in my life.

Bread has so many sacred meanings there because it is so vital to life in the desert. The city of Bethlehem where the messiah was born literally means "house of bread" in Hebrew. Everywhere one walks in the Holy City you will see bread just placed out all over the place. See to the Muslims bread is from the "grace of God" therefore it is never ever thrown away, if you don't finish a piece of bread, it is just put out anywhere!

And from the Roman perspective the Latin for the word compassion not only means to suffer with... but also to break bread with!

When I crossed the mount of the beatitudes it was pure golden in color...covered in wheat...Bread matters.

Here in our country bread is taken for granted...it can be gotten anywhere - at the nearby bakery or as bowls for clam chowder on the west coast - our options here are endless. Yet Bread is the foundation of the food pyramid especially there in the Middle East. So, when Jesus said He was the Bread of life, That carried some weight! He was trying to get people to see how important He was to their spiritual health and well-being.

The main purpose of John's Gospel is to show folks who Jesus is.

In John's Gospel, different metaphors are used to describe Christ....The living water...The living bread...The light of the world...The good shepherd...The vine. And regardless of the metaphor used the idea is that Jesus reflects a source of life to the individual as well as to the world...and these concepts were important to Jesus' audience...He is clearly saying that We really do need God to exist!!!

John Chapter six contains a long discourse on Jesus as the living bread. We began this chapter with the feeding of the five thousand which we read a couple weeks ago. And here Jesus never neglected the physical needs of the people. He came to proclaim good news. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied'...So if you are physically hungry...well then you better eat before I start telling you about spiritual food.

So Jesus first tends to their physical needs. He fed them with five loaves and two fishes. Reflecting on God to provide "just enough" to satisfy our human needs...but in trusting in God what at first appeared to be just enough quickly turned into abundance...In fact they ate as much as they wanted with left overs...not scarcity but abundance!

The crowd, of course, recognized that they had witnessed something special. So they wanted to make Jesus their king right NOW. They were looking for a leader to overthrow their current Roman occupier. So now they followed Him around everywhere... Jesus didn't want to be their king!

And Jesus knew that they had come because their hunger had been satisfied by eating bread, but they still didn't understand the bigger picture. Hunger for worldly bread only fills you up until your very next meal!

Jesus knew that they were in it for themselves...more miracles...more food! They wanted something immediate, but temporary, not spiritual and long lasting. Their minds were only focused on their immediate physical hungers!

Our failure then is that we start to worship the gift and not the giver, the creations rather than the creator. The thing rather than the thing behind the thing. Jesus told them, 'Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures.

And people of course would want a bread which gave eternal life, just as the Samaritan woman was excited to hear about the water of life. I never ever want to be hungry or thirsty again!

So, What do I need to do to get me some of this bread? And people of have asked this question throughout the ages... 'What must we do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus' made it clear that they didn't have to do anything...just accept the gift. It's free! We call it Grace!

But this paradox is part of our human condition, isn't it? We strive so hard to obtain happiness and security for ourselves and our families...but in the end we are never really ever satisfied. We climb the ladder only to find it goes nowhere...we are not satisfied and now we are hungry for something else! It never ends!

We spend our time, money and efforts on things that are only passing us by. Jesus told the people, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst'.

Jesus took this moment at Capernaum to make the point that it's possible to dedicate your whole life to "food that spoils" that is, for things of this life and situational satisfaction. Which are not bad...but don't confuse our temporary happiness with being grounded in eternal joy! We tend to easily confuse the two!

Jesus said that in the end it's a waste of effort...because no matter how good it looks or tastes, enjoy it for what it is... but realize it's never going to last... and like all earthly things, including our bodies, it all fades and perishes. Enjoy the flower today knowing tomorrow it will be gone. It will never provide lasting satisfaction, only temporary pleasure.

Jesus meant for us to put into perspective worldly goals versus a life spent in communion with God and one other.

So right away these people started shouting for this special bread. Where can I get me some of that?! And Jesus was telling them that it was right there in front of them – and that He was their spiritual Bread. Not physical temporary life, but spiritual ongoing life.

Let's think about it. Jesus created physical bread when he fed the 5,000 - He had met the needs of their physical hunger (what their stomach wanted). Now, He wanted to meet their spiritual needs (what their souls desperately needed). They now had to figure out that God was where true living came from.

Jesus used hunger and thirst – a need they knew intimately - and still know it today! The hungry had been filled using a little boy's basket of bread and fish. But how could He give them a life free of worldly hunger and thirst?

Jesus wanted them to make the leap from thinking physically to thinking spiritually - from their stomach...to their heart. He threw down this outrageous promise to meet their spiritual needs for all time...they would never know hunger and they would never thirst if they followed Him.

For some people, choosing Jesus as the Bread of Life is a difficult thing. There are so many other kinds of bread in the world. People might think of their "bread" as their work, their marriage, what others think of them, their stuff... In the end, all of those things spoil and are only temporary. What bread will satisfy the deepest needs we all have. That craving which the world will never satisfy.

So which bread are you eating today? Something you found in your kitchen or are you seeking something deeper?

Now I was very blessed to actually re-live these events...I sat where Jesus fed these people. I was in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee, I stood in the synagogue at Capernaum. I crossed the Mt of the Beatitudes, and I drank from the well in Samaria. I can say with first-hand experience that Jesus was and is very real! Not just historically but in living spirit!

While in Jerusalem and throughout all our pilgrimages I witnessed God winking at us!

A real issue for me there was the real tensions there between two desert peoples (Palestinians and Jews) along with the many different religions all worshipping the same God...it pained me greatly, more than I could even have imagined it would...

See occupation and oppression of a people is hard to swallow when witnessed first-hand. One can easily see the generational hatred in both groups as they have both switched roles throughout the centuries...I spoke with many of the local people and started seeing things on many different levels...it's very grey.

As I walked into Jerusalem, I saw many Israeli police (mostly just kids) with machine guns and riot gear controlling the roads during Ramadan where up to 400K pilgrims came into the Holy City to pray...rewind 2000 years and the same city had Roman Soldiers controlling the Jews as they made their way into Jerusalem for the Passover...what has really changed?

All eyes look heavenward asking for deliverance from occupation and for peace!  
What has changed in the human heart?

As the Dome of the Rock filled with Muslim pilgrims from all over, they prayed...they neither eat nor drank anything from sunrise to sunset as they set their sights on receiving Allah, the bread of life. It was 100 degrees outside.

It was humbling to behold so many voices lifted in prayer to the creator of the Universe. All sides there readily acknowledge the fact that they are all praying to the One true God!

Yet religious fundamentalism on all sides assures continuation of "exclusion" and I'm RIGHT your WRONG thinking...The only thing Jesus has always been fanatical about is us being inclusive with one another! Especially with those who have been pushed by us to the margins of society. The minute we vote on excluding a certain group or an individual from our midst we are on the WRONG side of God!!!

While there our group heard speakers from all sides: a Palestinian Christian, a Muslim Iman, and a Jewish Rabbi, and I readily saw each person's perspective... THEY were ALL right! What seemed ironic to me was that for these people to spend so much time in conversation with God why they can't imagine God's perspective on all this...bigger than their smaller world and religious views (eg The Temple Mt and the Western Wall are around the corner from each other!)

ALL God's people are talking AT Him but No one is listening... I saw and heard prayers round the clock. I witnessed competing buildings all reaching skywards towards communion with God while God was right there in their midst's the whole time. No ONE tradition... or No one PEOPLE... can ever OWN God or truly know God's point of view!

We need to stop arguing about God and become the very manifestation of God in the world. Only in this connected, whole way, can we begin to bring about The Kingdom of God today.

Yes there is Great faith among all these peoples, a faith that transcends our western ways in many respects. But as Paul says the greatest of all these things is Love, it's the only thing that transcends our differences and makes God's manifestation in the world possible! Love!

See God loves all His children equally and will forever seek communion with us... reconciliation of One Holy Family on One Holy Planet! And only with real abiding love can we experience this reality where ALL God's children live in peace together.

For us Christian's it's the easiest thing to understand...yet the hardest thing to live out. Jesus removed the ritual barriers to being in communion with God and each other. Today all our rituals need to point us toward God and others...and our practices should never be hindrances.

So which bread do we seek, how do we quench our insatiable thirst...and just as important... how do we serve this bread of life to others?

I want to leave you with a radically different story of the feeding of the five thousand by Peter Rollins, a Pastor in Northern Ireland very familiar with religious persecution and violence...Right and Wrong religious beliefs competing with one another (protestant & catholic).

Jesus withdrew privately by boat to a solitary place, but the crowds continued to follow him. Evening was now approaching and the people many of whom had traveled a great distance were growing hungry.

Seeing this Jesus sent his disciples out to gather food , but all they could find were five loaves and two fishes. Then Jesus asked that they go out again and gather up the provisions that the crowds had brought with them to sustain them on their travels. Once this was accomplished, a vast mountain of fish and bread stood before Jesus. Upon seeing this he directed the people to sit down upon the grass. Standing before the food and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks to God and broke the bread then he passed the food around among his twelve disciples.

Jesus and his friends ate like kings in full view of the starving people. But what was truly amazing, what was miraculous about this meal, was that when they themselves had finished the massive banquet there were not even enough crumbs left to fill a starving person's hand...

We who follow Christ are supposed to manifest God in the world today. And the real presence of Christ is not related to how we Christians act in Jesus' name!

In very REAL terms people learn about Christ through those who claim to live the way of Christ. If we Christians are supposed to be the Body of Christ in the world, then shouldn't we ask ourselves which version of the feeding of the five thousand do we show by our actions or inactions?

When Christ established His Church he asks Peter 3xs Do you love me...and after Peter responds yes... three times...Jesus' response to Peter is simply " feed my sheep!"

As Christians... are we feeding God's sheep the bread of life...do we bring hope and nourishment to those who believe in a better world... hoping and praying that Jesus will meet their needs... both here - physically... and in the life to come... Are we extending God's Grace to one another UNCONDITONALLY!

We need to stop arguing ABOUT God and become the very manifestation OF God in a needy world. Only in this connected way can we begin to bring about the kingdom of heaven.

Thank you Jesus for being here... already with us... here in our midst's. May we come to see you in others, so that we can love you with our whole heart and strength and soul and mind as we love our neighbors as ourselves – for both are different sides of the same coin! And ultimately may we come to represent you to those who are looking for help, hope and grace in this very needy world!

Now go and feed my sheep!

Your faithful servant,  
carmen