

GOSPEL READING: John 6:35-51

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35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day" 41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

OLD TESTAMENT READING: 1 Kings 19:4-8

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4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." 8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

This is word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **“Ordinary Bread”**

Today is a great day. It’s a great joyous day...a day that we can be together to hear and study God’s written word and to encounter the living Word among us. We are continuing in John 6, called the Bread of Life chapter, and I thought we might begin with a bit of Jewish humor...*An old man went to a diner every day for lunch. He always ordered the soup of the day. One day the manager asked him how he liked his meal. The old man replied, "It was good, but you could give a little more bread. Two slices of bread is not enough." So, the next day the manager told the waitress to give him four slices of bread. "How was your meal, sir?" the manager asked. "It was good, but you could give a little more bread." So, the next day the man was given eight slices of bread. Again, the same question and same response. The following day the manager asked the waitress to just give him a whole loaf of bread, 16 slices with his soup. And they heard the old man again say, "It was good, but you could give just a little more bread next time." The manager was definitely now obsessed with seeing this customer was satisfied with his meal, so he went to the bakery, and purchased a six-foot-long loaf of bread. When the old man came in as usual the next day, the waitress and the manager had cut the loaf in half, buttered the entire length of each half, and laid it out along the counter, right next to his bowl of soup. The old man sat down, devoured both his bowl of soup and the halves of the six-foot-long loaf of bread. The manager smiling confidently asked "Now, how was your meal TODAY, sir?" The old man replied: "It was good as usual, but I see you are back to serving only two slices of bread!"<sup>1</sup>*

The manager just couldn’t make the old man happy. Neither could Jesus, with the people, the crowd which surrounded him. Jesus had just come from the feeding them, upwards of 5000 of them, with 2 loaves of bread and 5 fish. You remember the story. They’d been the ones who had made such efforts to find Jesus after he had crossed the lake. But now they complained because Jesus had told them that HE WAS the Bread of Life, the Bread come down from heaven. “*How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’*”, the crowds grumbled. “*He*

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<sup>1</sup> Brett Blair. Sermon: “*I Am the Bread of Life*”. <https://sermons.com/sermon/i-am-the-bread-of-life/1335571> (accessed 8-10-18).

*can't be anything all that special. We know him. He's certainly not the One who is to be our Messiah. We watched him grow up, playing with the other kids in the village, learning to read from his mother, learning the carpentry trade from Joseph. He could not have come from Heaven."*

CS Lewis is famous for saying, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said....would either be a lunatic, on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg, or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God."<sup>2</sup>

Well, the crowd around Jesus, despite the miracle they'd just witnessed, could not imagine that Jesus, Mary's and Joseph's son, was Lord and God. They couldn't go there. Jesus could not be Lord. But maybe even more importantly, maybe even more to the point, is that they could not imagine that God would come as someone like Jesus! "Who ever heard of a God having anything to do with the everyday, the ordinary, the mundane, the dirty, anyway?"<sup>3</sup> God, the Master of the Universe, is supposed to be up there in heaven, majestic, mighty, removed from all the suffering, the pains, the ugliness of the created order, right? God, is not supposed to be identifying with humanity's ugliness, flaws, shortcomings, humanity's lies, gossip and grudges, humanity's predilection for violence and prejudice!

In their protest against Jesus' claims to be Lord, the crowd was also recognizing that the Lord could not be like him, like them! They were not worthy of God's attention. As David Lose imagines, the people were not only asking, "how can someone who is like us, save us?", but also "how can ones like us be saved?"<sup>4</sup> The people grumbled at Jesus,...but also at themselves because with Jesus' claims they were brought to recognize their own unworthiness.

And you know, IN professing as we do that God, the Almighty Creator of all that was, and is and is to be, has come to be one of us...we, ordinary puny creatures.... we are similarly

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<sup>2</sup> CS Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. (New York: Harper Collins; 1952), 53

<sup>3</sup> David Lose. *Pentecost 11B: Ordinary Things*. <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/08/pentecost-11-b/> (accessed 8/9/18).

<sup>4</sup>David Lose.

reminded that we ARE indeed ordinary, puny creatures! God came in weakness, not might. God came in vulnerability, not power-over. God came in humility, not wealth. God came in the ordinary and small, not extraordinary and grand. God came to save the unworthy, not the worthy.

Now, saying this, it is important to degress for a moment and remind ourselves of what salvation is. *It's what one of my professors used to drum into our heads. "Salvation, the saving act of Christ, is not something that is completed, something to be waited for, or something that is "in progress." It is not a guarantee of our disembodied future away in heaven", she'd say. "Rather, salvation is LIVING IN, WITH and FOR the One who accomplishes it for us, the One who is ETERNALLY incarnated, crucified, and resurrected." "And what's more, we are saved not just FROM something, but FOR something." "Don't you get it?" she'd ask. "Saved, we do not merely survive, but instead flourish; saved, we do not just get by, we thrive; saved, we do not just exist, but joyfully live a life abundant in and FOR Christ."*<sup>5</sup> Professor Cindy Rigby used to say that. And sure enough, in John 6, we hear Jesus say, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

**So, returning to our conversation, the bottom line is this: Jesus, the eternally incarnated, crucified and resurrected God, hallows the ordinary and common in his coming as such. It we believe this we have eternal life, a life with the quality of heaven. And what's more, Jesus seeks out the very same, the common and ordinary, to achieve God's will for the life of the world. If we believe this, if we eat of the Bread of Heaven, we, ordinary, puny & inadequate creatures, are saved FROM a miserable fearful life without him FOR a life with the privileged purpose of accomplishing his very extraordinary work.**

*I have wondered whether you have thought me a little crazy for praying for God's healing graces when you've been in the hospital through the technology, the medications, the laboratory tests, the support staff, in addition to through the hands of doctors and nurses. I*

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<sup>5</sup>Cyndy Rigby. APTS. Systematic Theology, Fall, 2009.

*have wondered if you have wondered why I simply do not pray for healing, or some kind of dramatic miracle.<sup>6</sup> Well, the reason is that I once attended a Presbytery meeting where I heard something that made me really think. The minister, officiating at the Table that day, not only thanked God for the bread and wine he had in his hands, but also for the workers at the factories who pressed the grapes, who refined the wheat, who made and packaged the end product. He prayed for the dock workers and the truck drivers who had brought the grain and the grapes to the factories, and for the farmers and the migrant workers whose hands tenderly planted and watered and then lovingly harvested the wheat plants and the fruit. That day, I thought about the ordinariness of the elements of bread and wine and all that they include, and how these are the signs which Jesus chose for his followers to see and taste and feel in remembrance of him. These are the signs which Jesus chose to remind us not only of God's promise of forgiveness, of wholeness and of life, but of his very tangible spiritual presence. "Come, taste and see that the Lord is good," right? Then the minister prayed that powerful ancient prayer, "God, pour out your Spirit on these ORINARY elements of bread and wine that they may BECOME for us the Body and Blood of Our Lord". He was asking that the risen Christ would be so joined with us in the bread and wine that he becomes the very present nourishment of our souls."<sup>7</sup> It was there and then that I came to understand that despite our puniness, our ordinariness, our unworthiness, Jesus meets us where we are to save us and to use us (and the medications and the technology, and the hands of the custodians and food preparers, the doctors and nurses, and all other ordinary things) so that his extraordinary purposes in the world might be achieved.*

So, friends, today is a great day. It IS indeed a great, joyous day. We've come to this place together with our hearts and minds, our hands, our mouths, our ears, our bodies...just as they are, to encounter the eternally incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Lord!... the one who took...and still takes...physical form for us. We've come, standing on the promise that he will summon out of us what we shall be, and then be present with us as we are sent...as we are sent to live

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<sup>6</sup> David Lose

<sup>7</sup> *Book of Confessions*, 3.21.

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John 6:35-51; 1 Kings 19:4-8

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**ABUNDANTly**...to live abundant lives which reflect the fullness of his love. We come. We come and then we are sent to bring Christ's freedom and justice and peace to this world. What a calling. What a privilege. It's what we are saved **FOR!** *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven,"* Jesus said. *"Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."* Amen.