

## 08 August 2021, The 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: John 6:35, 41-51 (Proper 14)

Last Sunday, I gave you an assignment: read John 6. I urge you to read John 6 again this week, whether you did last week or not. Read John 6, slowly, out loud so you use more parts of your brain. If a word or phrase strikes you, pause and allow that word or phrase to be an avenue of deeper relationship with Jesus. Do not worry about getting through the chapter in one sitting; there are no extra points for speed. Allow the Scriptures to soak in.

In Chapter 6 Jesus repeatedly, relentlessly centers his teaching about himself and his mission on one image. Six times Jesus uses the phrase ‘bread of/from heaven;’ once ‘bread of God’ is said. Twice Jesus says, ‘bread of life’ and twice he says, ‘those who eat this bread will live. ‘Living bread’ and ‘true bread’ appear once each, and once Jesus says, his ‘flesh’ is bread. This is not counting the words, ‘manna,’ ‘loaves,’ ‘food,’ or ‘it’ referring to bread, manna, loaves, or food. In all, the word ‘bread’ appears 17 times in Chapter 6. There is a theme here, centered on the image of bread.

The Chapter begins with a bread crisis. The crowd following Jesus are hungry and there is nothing to eat. Andrew finds a boy with 5 barley loaves—think something dinner roll size—and two fish. You remember what happens: Jesus takes the skimpy provisions, gives thanks, and distributes bread and fish to them all. They are not just satisfied; 12 baskets of leftovers are collected. There is an obvious contrast between the meagerness of what is available, and the bounty Jesus provides. There is something else to know that is a bit more subtle. The barley loaves and fish were the common daily meal of the poor. This is how Jesus come to us all, in the middle of our common lives, giving mercy, grace, and blessing through the common things of life, using, and transforming everyday things into avenues of God’s bountiful blessing. Therefore, the ‘bread from heaven’ we receive today is likely not grand and extraordinary. We pray, *give us today our daily bread*. To be a follower of Jesus is to live this truth. If it’s “I’ll take care of my normal life, you step in God when I need something really big, I cannot get myself” we are very far from the truth about God and ourselves. God’s goodness and grace are common, given to all. Our part is to recognize God at the center of all life.

Here is the second point: the bread of/from heaven—the predominate image in Chapter 6—is miraculous because its origin is God. There is no indication whatsoever that the boy’s everyday lunch of bread and fish miraculously turned into steak and twice-baked potato. They all received the food of the poor. God most blesses us with what we can so easily take for granted. Thomas Merton, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century spiritual writer wrote that our abiding sin is forgetfulness. We can, whether consciously or not, forget every atom of life is God’s gift. The cure is not merely remembering, but mindfulness expressed as gratitude. Gratitude begins in recalling the mind and heart to God; gratitude grows in prayer through which we connect our gratitude to God’s loving-kindness; gratitude matures through our works of mercy and charity by which we carry our gratitude for God’s love into the world.

A third point. Jesus says: *...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* (6:51). While the raw materials for God’s blessing—including ourselves—may appear to us as rather slim pickings, the result of God’s activity with such meager fare is an extravagant banquet. What has been paltry will become lushly fruitful. The early Bible scholar, Tertullian, wrote, “The flesh feeds on the Body and Blood of Christ, that the soul may grow fat on God.” To us ‘growing fat’ is theoretically bad; I say bad theoretically because many of us could drop 10 or 20 pounds with no ill effect. In the Bible fatness is an image of overwhelming blessing, goodness, and fruitfulness. If we will but be fed, God will nourish us in every situation, environment, and relationship growing us ‘fat’ in grace and spiritual maturity.

The truth is: although we live in a land of plenty our true nourishment is Jesus Christ. This is our continuing experience and our witness. Amen.