



Sunday August 11, 2024
John 6:35, 41-51 (Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

What's *your* favorite kind of bread? Because we all love bread, right? I mean who *doesn't* love bread. C'mon, admit it, even those of you on gluten free diets, or have a gluten allergy – you may not eat it, but you can't tell me that the smell of freshly baked bread isn't one of the most amazing things in life.

So, back to my original question: is it white bread, warm and soft right out of the oven? Or is it rye, sourdough, pumpernickel, Italian, or French. 12 grain, 7 grain, multigrain – or whatever magical combination of grains? Maybe it's a pita, a tortilla, a bagel, a biscuit, a croissant, a pretzel roll, or those soft chewy dinner rolls? I know I'm probably making you hungry right now but stay with me, I promise this is going somewhere. What about banana, zucchini, or cinnamon raisin? Perhaps your bread of choice comes in the form of something like...oh, I don't know...a doughnut, a muffin, or a scone. Whatever your go to bread of choice is...bread, throughout history has been an important part of humanity's daily nourishment.

In today's gospel we continue through the series of bread of life readings in the gospel of John and here we focus on a very honest and open discussion by Jesus concerning his identity and his mission. Today we find the crowd questioning Jesus as to how he's going to prove himself to them, *yet again*.

Their motive for continuing to follow Jesus was because he had fed them – he nourished their hunger with physical food. They had been following Jesus because of the miraculous healings he'd been performing; and now they had a literal need for bread to satisfy their *physical* hunger – and they were expecting Jesus to meet that need. However, this crowd was looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel were intended to lift the listeners from their narrow, food-centric existence to recognize that the ultimate hunger of life can only be filled with a different kind of bread. Jesus was highlighting the importance of what he was offering them, and then he attempted to teach them what their *real* need was rather than simply meeting their *perceived* need for food. Jesus was speaking of their eternal needs, but they were only concerned with their earthly needs.

Now, it would be easy for us to judge this crowd of people following Jesus for their shallow, near-sightedness. But let's not pretend for a moment that it was just *those* people from today's gospel. It happened with the children of God wandering in the desert, it happened with the lost sheep of Israel, and it happens with you and me. If we're really being honest with ourselves then we'll discover that *we're* just as guilty as our sisters and brothers from long ago. We are all guilty of trying to fulfill that *hunger* within us with any number of earthly things.

The human spirit has deep hungers that we struggle to identify, so we seek out many different kinds of bread in order to satisfy that hunger. We chase the temporary – wealth, attraction, hobbies, recognition, addictions, adventure, status, beauty. Our desires for a bigger house, a fancier car, a more perfect partner, a corner office, or to be thinner consume us. We become workaholics, we bargain with our moral compass, we fill our shelves with tokens of our success, and our houses and our lives with more and more stuff.

We strive to achieve some earthly status or benchmark, and yet, none of these earthly deceptions ever seem to deliver on their promises of peace or fulfillment. So we claw and scramble, searching for value in everything except our loving savior and God's purposes for our lives.

We foolishly attempt to replace or supplement God with a fantasy utopian paradise that could never possibly satisfy the human heart or our endless desires. None of this stuff will mean anything after our bodies breathe their last breath. Yet, like the crowd following Jesus, we too are often looking for the wrong things in the wrong places.

Whether we recognize it or not, our deepest hunger is for acceptance *by* and fellowship *with* God. Just as the human body needs food to sustain life, our soul – the essence of our very being, requires a different kind of food to support life that has eternal quality. And where can such food be found – only in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' declaration that he is the Bread of Life is also his *invitation* for us to taste and experience the abundant life that God has in store for us. So, how are we to understand this bold language that Jesus uses to talk about this bread for the soul?



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Let me ask you...are you hungry? Are you spiritually hungry? Do you long to have a relationship with something, or rather someone that sustains you? Who among us hasn't yearned for a greater sense of meaning in our lives, for freedom from our past mistakes, healing for our wounds, and assurance that we are loved just as we are? Are you suffering hunger pains from sin, from broken relationships, from self-destructive habits, from a lack of purpose in life, from emptiness and unfulfilled desires? Do you wish for this hunger to be satisfied once and for all? If so, then come – come and fill yourself with Jesus.

Jesus promises us that he not only nourishes us, but he also fulfills us. When we go beyond seeking God only in times of trouble, and we commit our lives to being lifelong learners and followers of Jesus, it is then that we will find our lives fulfilled – fulfilled by God's love and forgiveness that overflows in our lives beyond anything we could ever imagine. Fulfilled by living for something bigger than ourselves and sacrificing ourselves not just to make ends meet, but to expand the kingdom of God and to enable others to experience God's love and presence in their own lives.

Being truly fulfilled begins with the end of us and the beginning of God. It involves surrendering all of *our* hopes, ambitions, and expectations, as well as the control we think we have over the things and people in our lives and investing our future with God.

That, by the way, is why Jesus told his disciples to leave their families and professions to follow Him. *That* is why God commanded Abraham to leave everything and follow his lead to the Promised Land. As long as you and I continue deceiving ourselves by thinking we know what's best for us, we will never fully come to God and accept this "bread" that he offers to us. It's only when we are spiritually poor, blind, wounded, and lost that this life-giving, life-sustaining bread becomes all that we need...and all that we want.

It is only when we believe that God always has our best interests at heart, and that God always accomplishes what God promises that this "bread" becomes enough.

While sitting in a Roman prison the apostle Paul said, *"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

Jesus said to the people following him, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* The claim that Jesus is making here is a bold and radical one – to never be hungry again, and to never be thirsty again. Jesus was telling them, and Jesus is telling us, that He and He alone is the giver and sustainer of eternal life.

So, my friends, what bread have *you been* seeking? What bread do you truly hunger for? Do you hunger for the things of this life that offer you temporary satisfaction, or do you hunger for the things that satisfy God and God's eternal purposes for your life?

When it comes to a panini or a grilled cheese my go to is always sourdough. For breakfast it's always cinnamon raisin, but when it comes to this life, I always go with Jesus. The Bread of Life that has been given for me, for you, and for all. So take and eat and never be hungry again. Thanks be to God. Amen!