

*Bread of Heaven*©

Exodus 16:2-4,9-15; John 6:24-35

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We had a wonderful time on vacation with my son, David and his family, with daughter, Annie and her family. On Sunday we celebrated David's birthday and because we were all going up north to the UP first thing the next morning, everybody spent the night at our condo. We were a full house for sure with every bed, every air mattress and even the recliner full of sleeping people.

Meals with my family are interesting because we have meat-eaters, pescatarians, vegetarians and one who just doesn't like much of anything. Which is okay. We make it work and everybody is happy most of the time.

But as we all do, at various times, somebody was bound to stand in front of the refrigerator, door wide open, and stare.

"What can I eat?" We say to the refrigerator.

"I'm hungry," we proclaim (even though we just ate 45 minutes ago).

"What is there to eat?" We ask, staring at all the leftover food.

Sometimes, it feels like we are never satisfied. Of course we're not actually hungry. We just want something. At my continuing ed seminar that I recently went to we were fed lots of good food – three full meals a day, including a salad bar and dessert. But about an hour after our meal, someone at our table in the classroom would start pulling out snacks – peanut M&M's, trail mix, popcorn, nuts, crackers.

It was like we could not get enough food! My stomach was noticeably full all the time. Every night I'd go to bed telling myself – tomorrow will be just fruit in the morning and salad for lunch and no snacking in between. Of course, I ignored myself and did what everyone else was doing. Eating our fill of food. Listening to a teacher is hard work!

So, even though we eat until we're full, we stand in front of the fridge searching for more. We cannot get satisfied sometimes.

And so the people were searching for Jesus – the source of the food they had been miraculously given the day before. Jesus had taken five loaves of bread and three fish and had multiplied it until there was enough for the 5,000 people who were there listening and learning from Jesus. They had eaten until they were completely full. It very well may have been the first time in a long time that they had been that full. Probably most of them were peasants who did not have a lot.

But, as we do, they were wanting more the next day. They wanted to find Jesus and were hoping that he might provide that food again.

But the puzzling thing was that there had been one boat at the shore and they saw the disciples get in it and go out to cross the lake. But Jesus was not in the boat. So they searched for him but could not find him. Searching for Jesus was their focus. Searching for the source of food. And maybe a little wisdom teaching as well.

Finally, John says there were some boats that came in from Tiberias and they boarded the boats and crossed over the lake to Capernaum looking for Jesus. They were persistent in their determination to find him.

When they arrived, there he was! Their first statement was “How did you get over here, Jesus? When did you come?”

Of course, we know how Jesus got there. His mode of crossing the lake was to walk on the water. In a storm. Scaring the disciples in to believing they were seeing a ghost.

Jesus doesn't bother to answer how he got there. He actually confronted them about why they were looking for him. His compassion for the crowd from the day before seems to have turned a little irritable now. At least it was a moment to be challenged on just why they really wanted him.

He said, “you come because you ate your fill yesterday and you want more today. I'm telling you that you should work for the *real* food – the bread that doesn't get stale or moldy. The real bread is bread from heaven that gives life forever.”

So they asked, “what can we do to perform the works of God – these works that will give us this real bread?”

Now this is pretty important here, this answer of Jesus. There are those who are determined that they must work for, they do some work that will earn their salvation. So what is the work Jesus tells them to do?

“Believe. That is your work,” he tells them. “Believe in the one God has sent.” Him. Jesus. It's that simple. Just believe.

And then – this totally amazes me – the people ask for a sign! “Give us a sign so we know and can believe that you are the one sent from God.”

Are you kidding me? Turning 3 fish and 5 loaves of bread into a feast for 5,000 people isn't enough of a sign? What more did they want? How could they be so blind? So dumb?

But they persisted. They brought up what happened with their ancestors in the wilderness when Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt and how Moses had caused Manna from heaven to come down to the ground for them to eat every day, for a very long time. They were challenging Jesus to do something like that.

Again, Jesus challenged them. “That Manna from heaven that our ancestors were given? That wasn’t from Moses. That came straight from God. Yet, even that bread was temporary. They had a ration each day and it perished if they didn’t eat their daily portion. Yet, just as God gave that temporary bread, God has given bread that never perishes, that is life-giving and that will satisfy all your hunger.”

“For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus told them.

They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’

And 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.’

Those silly people – searching for Jesus; searching for signs when the signs were right in their face. Jesus’ miracles were certainly more than some magic trick for their entertainment. Jesus gave them many signs.

But even the disciples were constantly amazed at the things Jesus’ did. They ate with him and talked and traveled daily with him. They heard him speak and watched all the things he did – healing many people; forgiving the unforgivable; teaching, preaching, performing many miracles.

And yet, when they saw him walking on the waves in the storm, they were afraid. They too, could not quite see the signs of who Jesus really was.

What about you? Who are you searching for? Are you searching for the real Jesus? Are you waiting and looking for a sign, even though they may be plenty right in front of you? Are you feeling that Jesus has left the premises and in doing so has left you or us, as a church, high and dry?

Our lives are full of many things. We have much to enjoy in this life, don’t we? Family – children, grandchildren, more than enough to eat – at least for most of us here. We have warm homes and cars to get around in. Some income, even if we think it’s not enough.

But we also have our trials. We have illnesses and frailties. We have many challenges in life. We have some things that are almost unbearable in our relationships or our lives. We have longings and regrets. We have doubts and fears and sometimes – if we are willing to admit it – we feel like God may have just abandoned us and Jesus isn’t real.

As a congregation in a mainline church we see good things but we also see things that are so different from what we used to know. Pews that are empty. Sunday School classes that are no more. Youth group that isn’t happening right now because they are all gone to college. We look at our budget – our needs against what we receive and we wonder how long we can go on. That is the hard cold truth.

But, my dear beloved people, we are people of God. We eat from the Bread of Life. We, the people of God, are the means, but not the end. I mean we are the means of God's grace and mission in the world today but we are not the end of it all. God has a purpose and a life that is lasting for all God's people.

Jesus promises that those who believe in him and eat the bread that he gives will never die. Will live forever.

We look for signs of life but they are all right in front of us, just as they were in front of those people so long ago. Jesus is active in our lives, in our sickness, in the grief we feel, in the challenges we have. We long for a sign but it is right in front of our eyes, beloved. God has given us Jesus Christ who sustains us and guides and teaches us. Who is with us and the good times and in the times of sorrow and despair. We just need to look and see.

Have you noticed the signboard out in the front? It's meant to be humorous saying "You did ask for a sign. – God"

My friends – people of God - God has given you a sign. The Bread of Life. The Bread of Heaven that gives life always.

You did ask for a sign. And God has sent it right down from heaven.

Jesus is the sign!

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