

## HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

**Text: John 6:35-51**

**10/4/09**

### **Introduction**

It was a familiar site in every village through which Jesus and his disciples walked: clay ovens, fired with wood, in which the women of each household would bake their daily bread. The ovens were located out back, behind the houses, to minimize the risk of fire. Early each morning, the women would sweep out the ashes from the day before and stoke the ovens with dry sticks. They'd light the fire and direct a child to keep feeding dry branches into it, until the right temperature was reached.

While this was happening, the women would go through the familiar ritual of bread-making: preparing the dough from flour and water, kneading it, adding the yeast, waiting for the dough to rise, then pounding it down, only to have it rise again. When it reached the desired consistency, these bakers would press it out flat and slide it into the clay oven. What came out was a warm, bubbly loaf very much like pita bread. It was the staff of life for those people. Other food items might come and go with the seasons — and with the success of those who hunted or fished — but bread was the staple that got them through seasons of feast and famine alike.

And Jesus looked at those painfully familiar loaves of bread and saw in them something every one needed to know.

Spread before us today are familiar loaves of bread. If you've been here very often you've seen it before. As you look upon them what do you see? Is it something everyone needs to know?

1. **Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus stood among people who knew what it was to be hungry and to be full and said and said I am as fundamental and essential as the bread you bake in your ovens every day.**

Most of us in our part of the world don't see bread that way anymore. Bread is fine, unless we are chasing after a low-carb diet. But bread is hardly the staff of life. The bread we buy is typically packaged in plastic. There are endless varieties. It's pre-cut into slices, carefully engineered to fit the slots on a toaster. The best of it is nutritious and good for us in moderate quantities, but the typical slice of store-bought bread isn't something any of us spend much time thinking about.

Bread can be a bit boring. We might prefer to hear that Jesus is the Pop-Tart of life, the double shot mocha espresso of life, the duck a l'orange of life, the coconut pecan frosting on my already baked German chocolate cake of life. But the “bread” of life? Didn't we get beyond the fundamentals long ago?

Perhaps Jesus was saying I'm not an optional extra. I'm not a special occasion. I'm not a Christmas ham or a Thanksgiving turkey. I am as essential for life as the food you put in your mouths every day. I am the gift of God.

Is he? The people of his day struggled to see it. They looked at his man who claimed to be bread and asked, “*Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?*” He's not so remarkable.

We struggle to see it. We live in a world of endless options and unlimited personal choices – whether its bread, faith, or anything else. To be told there's something we *must* have, apart from which life is unthinkable is hard to imagine or accept. Jesus is fine; but fundamental to life? Why does he matter so much?

Wendall Berry is a Christian writer who can really make you stop and think. He wrote in his Cyberjournal:

*Most of us cannot imagine the wheat beyond the bread, or the farmer beyond the wheat, or the farm beyond the farmer, or the history beyond the farm. Most people cannot imagine the forest ... that produced their houses and furniture and paper; or the landscapes, the streams and the weather that fill their pitchers and bathtubs and swimming pools with water. Most people appear to assume that when they have paid their money for these things they have entirely met their obligations” (“In Distrust of Movement”).*

Who is Jesus beyond that which I can acquire at my local church? If we're going to say that Jesus equals the bread we can't live without, we're going to need to take a closer look at story behind the loaf.

**2. John's gospel can help us here. It's as if he leaves a trail of bread crumbs throughout its pages, each one filling in a bit of the story of why Jesus is bread we can't live without.**

The bread crumbs begin with the words "I am..." The first one is here in verse 35, "*I am the bread of life.*" I am the staple of life.

But we need more help. In John 8:12 he says "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*"

Jesus is saying that's he's God's illumination in a world locked in a struggle spiritual and moral blindness. Most of us find light to be essential in the darkest places.

A little further down the path we find another crumb. In John 10:7 we read, "*I am the gate for the sheep.*" I mark the entrance to safe pasture in a dangerous life. Sheep need a safe place to be. And though it may strike you as a bit of a come down, Jesus is quick to say that you and I are sheep.

He goes on to say "*I am the good shepherd,*" in John 10:11. Sheep need a shepherd; someone recognizes their dangers and will fight their battles. Shepherds do that, even at the cost of their own lives.

We find another crumb that makes up the loaf: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* (11:25) No one has figured out how to move so far beyond life's fundamentals that they don't die. Jesus is the bread of life even in face of death.

In John 14: 6 we read "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" He's claiming he's the sure and certain path in this into the presence of God. In a life of endless intersections, and confusing exits he's inviting us to know a reliable way home.

And in John 15:5 he says, "*I am the vine and you are the branches.*" He's saying I am the communion you seek in the deepest part of your heart with the reality of God. I am the sources of deepest fulfillment. I am the key to human flourishing.

I am bread, light, the gate, the shepherd, resurrection, the way, the vine – all those crumbs combine into mighty loaf. That's because Jesus is no less than the fullness of God himself. The God who told Moses all those millennia ago that "I am", is announcing himself again in Jesus. "I am." He's hardly optional or extra, but as fundamental as our next breath. As necessary as our next meal.

**3. We've been invited satisfy our deepest hungers with the bread of Christ. But here's the surprise. Following that trail of crumbs leads to meal intended for the whole world.**

John writes:

*I am the living bread which that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

To feast spiritually upon the loaf of Jesus Christ is to be nourished in a life that will never end... And it's to discover that the God life is not intended for only a few.

World Communion Sunday is an opportunity for the church to invite the world to feast that is finally intended for all. Just as in the miracle behind our scripture of Jesus feeding the 5000 with five loaves and two fish – and having 12 baskets of scraps left over – there's plenty of Christ for us – and everybody else who will come to feast.

Not only is the bread of Christ fundamental for life. There's plenty to go around. We come to the table today to remember that. To realize that when Jesus gave his flesh he didn't do it for a select few. He gave it for Catholics and Protestants, and the Orthodox. He gave it for the struggling church in North America and Europe and the exploding church in South America and Africa. And especially he gave it for the millions who have yet to find their way to the table.

I need to feed upon Christ in answer to the deepest hungers of my soul. You need to feed upon Christ in response to the deepest hungers of your soul. As we do that today let's not forget that what brings us to the table is the hunger that lives in every human heart. There is no scarcity of Grace. There is no shortage of seats at the banquet. There is plenty of the bread of life to go around.

## **Conclusion**

I've read that in China a typical greeting, instead of "How are you?" is "Have you had your rice today?" A greeting to which one is expected to always reply, "Yes". Rice is so fundamental to life in that part of the world that it's hard to imagine health, wholeness, and well-being without it.

Have you had bread today? John is saying that fundamental to the life of the church and the world is what we do with that familiar loaf we call Jesus. He wants us to bond with Jesus; to trust Jesus; to be loyal to Jesus. He wants us feast upon Jesus.