

Bread from Heaven
John 6:24 – 35
Sunday, August 5, 2018

I want to start off by showing you my grandmother's bread tray. When I was growing up, we would go to dinner at my grandparents' house every Sunday night. Most of the time, my grandfather would barbeque ribs and chicken on the grill. Sometimes (on the *fancy* nights) he would grill steaks. And on the bad nights, my grandmother would make turkey. But no matter what we were having, my grandmother would *always* serve a loaf of bread on this. It would be French bread that she sliced and put garlic and *way* too much butter in between the slices. It was *so good*. To this day, I have never found bread that I love as much as my grandmother's bread.

The only *problem* was, about 50% of the time (and that might be generous), my grandmother *burned* the bread. She would put it in the oven about five or ten minutes before we started eating, so that it would be done and hot right as we sat down. But she would also be cooking corn and green beans and getting a salad ready, and with all of that going on, all of that food coming to the table at once, she would forget that the bread was in the oven. We would sit down, pray, and start eating. About ten minutes later, we would smell something, and my grandmother would say, "Oh, the bread!" and run over to the oven. But it was too late. The bread would be charred. Still, though, she would take that burnt bread, put it on this tray, and bring it to the table, *just in case* anyone still wanted to eat it. It became a running joke in our family, "Oh, grandma burned the bread again!" Or when she was putting it in, one of us kids would say, "Don't burn it this time," and she would laugh, but then she would burn it anyway.

When she died two years ago, my aunt and uncle were getting her house ready to sell. As they were going through it, they said, "Let us know if there's anything you want to keep." This bread tray was the only thing that I wanted. I have such good memories of my grandparents just by

looking at this bread tray. My grandmother was an artist. We have quite a few of her paintings hanging in our house, and there were a ton more in her house that I could have had. But *nothing else* reminds me of my grandmother like this bread tray. And the thing is, it's not about the *bread* (which most of the time was ruined). It's about what the bread *meant*. What it *reminds* me of. The laughter and the love and the good times that I experienced around that table. When I hold this bread tray, I don't think about the burned bread. I think about *that*. About what the bread *meant*.

Jesus has just finished feeding 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. After he does this, he and his disciples get in a boat and go off by themselves, away from the crowd. But the crowd goes looking for him. He has just done this *amazing* thing, and they want *more*. When they find him, he says to them, "You came looking for me, not because you saw *signs*, but because you ate your fill of bread." In other words, they were focused on the bread itself, *not* what the bread *meant*.

Jesus talks about *signs* here; he says, "You came looking for me, not because you saw *signs*...." A *sign* is something that directs you to something else, right? If you are out to eat at a restaurant, and you need to go to the restroom, you go looking for a *sign* that says, "Restroom." That sign itself is not the restroom. It is simply directing you to the thing that you are looking for. Jesus is referring to his multiplying the bread and the fish as a *sign*. Multiplying bread and fish is not the point. It was meant to direct them to something else. It was meant to *remind* them of something.

Jesus says to them, "Do not work for the food that *perishes*, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." They say to him, "How do we *get* that? What do we have to *do* to perform the works of God that will get us the food that endures for eternal

life?” Jesus says to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent.” (Any time we see the word *believe* in the New Testament, it’s the Greek word *pisteo*, and it is best understood not as mental assent or intellectual belief – believing in our minds that something is true. It is best understood as *trust*. You can *believe* something and not do anything about it. *Pisteo* is a *lived expression* of belief arising out of *trust*. “I can *do* this because I *trust* in this.” So Jesus is saying here, “You do the work of God by trusting in me, living your life out of trust in me.”)

He explains this to them, and the next thing they say is, “Well, okay, what *sign* are you going to give us, so that we can *see* it and *trust* in you? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness. God gave them bread from heaven when they had no other food to eat. That was *their* sign that helped them trust God. What sign are you going to give *us*?” And Jesus just has to be like, “Are you *kidding* me? I literally just fed 5,000 people in the wilderness when you had no food to eat! I just did *the exact thing* that you’re talking about! And you’re asking me what *sign* I’m going to give you?” It’s like they saw this spectacular thing that Jesus *did*, but they didn’t understand what it *meant*. They were *close*, though.

The bread is supposed to remind them of what God did for the people of Israel in the wilderness, after they had been set free from slavery in Egypt. They had no food and thought they were going to die, so God rained down bread from heaven each day that sustained them for forty years. They’re thinking along these lines, but they still only see the *bread* and not what the bread *meant*. The bread was not the point, for the people of Israel or for them. The bread is meant to *remind* them that God is *with* them, and God will *provide* for them, and God will sustain their lives. Manna in the wilderness was an opportunity for the people of Israel to learn to trust God and to *live* out of that trust.

And now Jesus turns it all around on them and says, “*I am that manna. I am the bread of God that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am your reminder that God is with you, and God will provide for you, and God will sustain your lives.*”

In a world in which we are constantly made to live in *fear* that there is *not enough* (not enough time, not enough money or food for everyone, not enough jobs, not enough security, not enough love), Jesus invites us to trust in God’s ability to provide for our lives, and to live each day out of that trust. Jesus is saying to the crowd and to us, “Manna is not just something that happened thousands of years ago. It is something that is available to you now; God’s nourishing, sustaining power in this world and in your life when it feels like there is not enough.”

And he reminds us of that each time we share this meal. This meal that is so small and simple that we look at a tiny piece of bread, and we think, “There is no way that could nourish and sustain me.” But it’s not about the *bread*. It’s about what the bread *means*. Through this meal Jesus is inviting us to trust that, when it seems like there is not enough, God provides and gives us what we need to keep going.

When I look at this bread tray, I don’t think about the *bread* – how it tasted or whether it was burnt. I think about those family dinners that nourished me – the conversation, the stories, the laughter, and the love that I experienced at that table. When we share this meal in a moment, don’t just focus on the *bread* – how it tastes, how it’s served, whether it’s stale or fresh. Focus on what it *means* – on how this family meal nourishes you, and the love that you experience at this table.

This meal is a *sign*. It is pointing you to something else. To *someone* else. To Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life. What does it mean for Jesus to be your *manna*? To satisfy whatever it is that you are hungering and thirsting for. To nourish and sustain your life where it seems like there is not enough. Come to this table and trust in God's ability to provide for your life. And then go out to *live* out of that trust.