

Bread from Heaven

If you grew up Jewish around Capernaum and the sea of Galilee, you would have looked forward to the **Passover celebration** each year. It was a time when you people **told their most important story of God saving them** from slavery, and making them his own special people with their very own homeland. **But this year it will be different.** A **teacher, rabbi, miracle worker** would come to town and turn your celebration on its head. This is the story of **John, chapter 6**. If you have **your Bibles, or pull it up** on your phone, I'd like for you to refer back, because I'm not going to read it all, but it is **one coherent message**.

Jesus has just performed two miracles in the brief time before this teaching part of chapter 6. **He has fed 5000** who were following him. After the crowd has seen this, they proclaim that they now know **what Jesus is about, and how they can use him**. He is a prophet, and they want to try to **force him to become a king**. In other words, they have **completely missed the point**.

The rest of the story takes place across the lake in **Capernaum**. The **disciples take a boat**. Jesus walks...across the water. That's the second miracle.

The feeding of the 5000 is in the background of what Jesus is going to teach across the lake the next day. Some will have seen this, others would not.

It is important to keep in mind that **this is happening in the Synagogue at Capernaum, and it is Passover**. The Jewish community would have been **studying their ancestor's departure from Egypt and the flight** through the desert. **And what is one of the things that happened in the desert?** God fed his people with manna. **Now Jesus is feeding them with bread**, not in the desert, but in a place **where there isn't enough food** for this huge crowd.

Jesus has connected what he has come to do with what God did for the people in the desert, only better. **This is better than manna. No, not the pita bread the 5000 ate, a different kind of bread.**

There are some people in the synagogue at Capernaum **who didn't see the feeding of the 5000**. They say this to Jesus as he is teaching. "Show us a miraculous sign **if you want us to believe in you**. What can you do?"³¹ After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, "Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat." **This is the story they are talking about during Passover.**

³² Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven."³³ **The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" They don't get what Jesus is saying and respond...³⁴ "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day."

What scholars believe is that there was a belief in Judaism at that time that there was a **storehouse of manna in heaven** that God opened for his people in the desert. **The next time it will be opened would be when the Messiah** comes instituting a second exodus. This time they will be **set free from their overlords, the Romans**. Scholars **in that time wrote commentary of the scriptures** that described how this would happen.

They want a sign that Jesus is the one to reopen the storehouses of heaven. Keep in mind **Jesus has already fed 5000 with a few pieces of pita bread** and a few fish. **But that's not what Jesus is driving at in this sermon, as we will see.**

Is Jesus really talking about bread? Remember he said, **“man does not live by bread alone, but what comes from the mouth of the Lord.”** Here's the **punch line.**

³⁵ Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. ³⁷ However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. ³⁹ And this is the will of God, that I should not **lose even one of all those he has given me**, but that I should raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ **For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life.** I will raise them up at the last day.” ⁴¹ Then the people **began to murmur in disagreement** because he had said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, **“Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph?** We know his father and mother. How can he say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

Now their resistance to Jesus' message is clear. They don't believe or don't want to believe. **So, what does Jesus do? He presses in harder.** ⁴³ But Jesus replied, “Stop complaining about what I said. ⁴⁴ **For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me**, and at the last day I will raise them up. ⁴⁵ As it is written in the Scriptures, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.) In other words, **you aren't listening to the Father!**

Jesus is not put off by their unbelief because he is looking for the ones his father is giving him and those are the ones who believe, even though they don't completely understand. They trust Jesus when he says he is the bread of life.

Jesus **continues to push them** to see who trusts him. ⁴⁷ “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ Yes, I am the bread of life! ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, **but they all died.** ⁵⁰ Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, **however, will never die.** ⁵¹ I am the **living bread that came down from heaven.** Like I said, it's better than manna and better than miracle pita! Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; But now he comes to the punch line. **and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”** Now their **heads are about to explode.** Bread is flesh given for others.

⁵² Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked.

This is scandalous to the ears of these jews. Why not make **the message a little more palatable? Easier to swallow.** Jesus is looking for **those being drawn** to him. **The best way to make that obvious is to say stuff like this.**

Jesus connects himself as a blood sacrifice like those in the temple, but a one for all. **So now he is bread from heaven that must be consumed, but he is also a blood sacrifice on the altar in the temple.** This kind of talk should **thin the herd** a bit.

John, the **Baptist, alluded** to Jesus as a sacrifice. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The **Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29 **The lamb that was sacrificed as their sin offering, only better.**

Does Jesus ease off the gas; no he punches it. ⁵³ So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. ⁵⁴ But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. ⁵⁵ **For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.** What really satisfies and nourishes. ⁵⁶ Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood **remains in me, and I in him.** Here’s a clue to what Jesus is driving at. ⁵⁷ I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, **anyone who feeds on me will live because of me.** ⁵⁸ I am the **true bread that came down from heaven.** Anyone who eats this bread **will not die as your ancestors did** (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.” ⁵⁹ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

“All we wanted to do was celebrate Passover like we always do, where we know what is coming, but then Jesus showed up. Jesus says that he is the bread of life, or bread from heaven. How can one...Experience Jesus as the Bread of Life. **Taste and see if he is good and if he nourishes.**

Jesus has moved from a physical example of who he is to a spiritual one. It was **easy to see how Jesus “saved them” from hunger** by turning a few pieces of pita bread. They were out in a **rural area with no food** by the time they figure out that they were hungry.

Here’s a Pastor Bill food tip. Take a pita, put a little olive oil in a cast iron skillet and brown it on both sides. Then cut it like a pie and dip the triangle pieces in hummus. **An underrated snack, very satisfying.**

But Jesus wasn’t talking about that kind of satisfaction, that kind of sustenance. Jesus is saying **“I am your spiritual sustenance.”** He nourishes and sustains them in a world **where they are hoping for God to do something to improve your situation.**

Jesus didn’t give some of them **bread and fish and then stop there.** **He wants to go deeper, but are they willing? Are we willing?**

Is Jesus what sustains you? Are you willing or are you staying on the surface, asking if Jesus will take care of this need or that need in your life as you see it.

Let me remind you of what he said back in the sermon on the mount. God blesses those who **hunger and thirst** for justice, for they will be satisfied. John 5:6 **There’s a deeper yearning, hankering that Jesus wants to get to. He got their attention with the loaves and fishes during the Passover celebration, but there’s more.**

Do you want to experience Jesus as the bread of life? If so, **there are some natural barriers for them and for us** today that you **need to negotiate or you probably aren’t that serious about this deeper spiritual nourishment** and sustenance that Jesus is offering. **“I’m good, I’ll just stick with the Jesus who gives me bread and raises my political hopes.”**

Can you push through confusion, not understanding everything?

It goes without saying that Jesus has done and said some confusing things, even disturbing things. He makes it look like he's a messiah who will save us from the Romans, but he runs away. **He's comparing himself to manna**, but they died. He is a different kind of bread that will give them life eternal. **And then there's that almost gross stuff** about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. **They are confused, agitated, and getting angry.**

Do you need it to be black and white? Not as much trust needed if it is black and white. Gray demands trust.

On mission trips with students, I purposely wouldn't tell them exactly what we were doing next as we wandered around cities like Detroit, Chicago, and LA. Why, because if I told them we will be going to such and such shelter, serving lunch and meeting people **and something changed, look out.** Because we might get there, and **they want us to do something else. There's a certain type of person who can't handle that.** So, I would keep in general. **It's easy for the kids to trust me if I tell them exactly what we will do, but if they can trust me when I say we are going to go see Jesus at work in the city and we get to join him.** If they trust me with that then **they really do trust me.**

Do you demand an itinerary or do you trust Jesus to say, "I am the bread that gives eternal life." Do you trust him to bring him into your life, **to the heart so that he can nourish you spiritually in the deep places.**

My dad had a saying, **"My theology changes."** To the original grumpy old men club. These men couldn't handle being confused. Their belief system was tight, clean, and buttoned down.

At the Apprentice Gathering last week Skye Jethanit did a talk entitled **"Sin, Certainty, & Stupidity.** He compared **Humble curiosity vs. sinful certainty.** Before we **collectively lose our minds, yes, there are certainties**, like Jesus is God and flesh and is the only path to full eternal life, God loves us, there is forgiveness, and we have hope. **But there's a lot of gray and Jesus is taking us on a field trip into the gray, but can we handle it.**

Are you humbly curious? Can you say, "I don't know." I struggle with that sometimes. In our **bridge group, Annemarie** asked about all the killing and blood. **Like the good Bible answer man, I took a few swings at it.** She was not convinced. Then I realized what I was trying to do. **I was trying to make a gray black and white.** I, we, needed to trust God, **even though we didn't understand that bloody business** in the Old Testament. **Then I said, "I don't know, what do you guys think?"**

Jesus is causing stress because what he is saying and doing doesn't fit into the story, they tell themselves, about life and God. I was reminded of a term I had learned years ago, **Cognitive dissidence.** This is a fancy way of saying when **something you believe or accept as truth comes up against something else** that is being offered as truth and **there is strong evidence that this new idea is truth.** A **dissonant chord in music is two pitches that don't blend** into a lovely cord, but rather sound like **two cats fighting.** Issues of cognitive distance. **Creates tension.**

Here's what is happening in this story. **They want to hang on to their much loved, comfortable old belief.** But they need to **do some fancy footwork to pull this off and dismiss this newcomer with all its evidence of truth.**

1. **Deny the evidence.** “Was that person really blind at birth?”
2. **Discredit the messenger.** They called the man, formerly blind man, “sinful from birth.”
3. **Distance yourself from this new thing.** Then just **stay clear of Jesus** so you don’t have to hear anything counter to your much loved and long held belief about God and people.

If we choose to stop denying the evidence about Jesus. He is king and he wants a relationship with me, and all other views of life and God are lies. **If we choose not to discredit messengers, like the Bible,** or others who say he is king. **If we choose not to create distance** between all the ways Jesus wants to speak to us. **Jesus can be the bread that, when eaten, gives eternal life.**

The next step is for these confused, anxious, and angry people is to ask...Can you handle Jesus’ deconstructing what makes you feel safe?

I use deconstructing instead of blowing up because it better describes that it is **loving**, and it is for the **purpose of constructing something new and better.** You want to **save the pieces because you can use them in something else.**

My Cousin Becky and her husband built a house by using mostly reclaimed resources like barn wood, old bricks and metal. I never saw it first-hand, but heard it was remarkable. **If those old buildings that weren’t being used for their original purposes had been blown up, burned down, or left to rot the wood,** brick and other materials that could have been used for something different would have deteriorated.

Jesus deconstructing what makes us feel safe is what “Eat my flesh and drink my blood” is all about. This is to **“take Jesus into your core.”** Allow him to **direct and nourish.** **This is a picture of intimacy which is about pushing through boundaries.**

We sometimes use the language, **“letting that person in.”** **Giving access to your life and your story.** But that is scary!

(“Lion, Witch, Wardrobe”) Mr. Beaver says “Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion.”
“Ooh!” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”...“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Intimacy is not safe, it is good when the one we let in is good.

Jesus isn’t safe if you’re committed to staying exactly as you are today and not changing. **He wants to come into your core, take out the rusted and rotten parts of who you are and what you believe.**

He will rebuild you to be more and more like Him. If you let Him...

One of my literary mentors is Bill Hull, cofounder of The Bonhoeffer Project. After a time of God speaking to him about his ministry, **he realized that he didn’t have the credibility he needed to lead his congregation to the deep change** they needed. **The Holy Spirit allowed him to see that he had not let the congregation into his life.** He kept them at a **safe distance by not allowing**

them to see his real self. Bill Hull, **I'm going to trust me with you.** Then he pulled back the veil. **I'm going to trust you** that I don't really like most worship music, **I prefer The Eagles...** I feel like most church activities "aren't for me."

There is another response to Jesus in this story. Remember how they **wanted to force him to be their kind of king?** Here in the form of a question to them and to us...Do you want to hijack Jesus for your own designs?

In other words, you want to **add a little Jesus to how you are already viewing God and the world...**

When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!" ¹⁵When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself. John 6:14-15

Jesus didn't cooperate with what they wanted from him. He didn't say, **"OK, let's compromise. I'll be your kind of king in Jerusalem** and that can be a platform for the things I want to do creating the church.

I'm not here just so you can use me to get to heaven. I'm not here to **fit into your political views.** I'm not here just so you can **feel good about yourself...**

This is where the story comes to a fork in the road. What are the people who are confused, agitated and angry going to do? **Jesus divides the audience. Who are my sheep, who can hear my voice?** Who is the father sending me? **And who are those who do not have ears to even begin to hear me.** ⁴⁵As it is written in the Scriptures, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. John 6:45

Here's another troubling thing about this story we need to...Understand, Jesus is willing to let you walk away he doesn't chase.

⁶⁶At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. ⁶⁷Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰Then Jesus said, "I chose the twelve of you, but one is a devil." ⁷¹He was speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve, who would later betray him. John 6:70-71

Sometimes people experience something with Jesus, and they start following him, but then they realize that he wants everything, even their much loved and long held story about what God is and how he connects with people. They make a commitment to Jesus and start learning and growing with the word and in community with others. **But that old story has such a pull.** It's so long been a part of their lives. And so, they drift away. **The energy it takes to push through all of that conflict between Jesus and how I live and think is too much.**

Steps of Obedience

1. Eat bread for 7 days. Add gluten free jokes here and high carb. Feed on this passage for a week.

I'm going to read this slowly and I want you to **picture Jesus saying this to you**. What does his face describe about how he feels about you and what he is saying to you? ⁵³So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. ⁵⁴But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever." John 6:53-58

Come to His table today. Table and eating, allowing Jesus not just near but into you is about intimacy. Being nourished by him around a **table is where barriers are broken**. Not the **bread line** or the **drive through** or handing it over a counter. Sitting together not in a hurry but sharing together.