

Scripture

John 6: 25-35

(NRSVUE)

²⁵ When they found him back across the sea, they said, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “You’ve come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs—and for free.

²⁷ “Don’t waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last.”

²⁸ To that they said, “Well, what do we do then to get in on God’s works?”

²⁹ Jesus said, “Sign on with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God’s works.”

³⁰⁻³¹ They waffled: “Why don’t you give us a clue about who you are, just a hint of what’s going on? When we see what’s up, we’ll commit ourselves. Show us what you can do. Moses fed our ancestors with bread in the desert. It says so in the Scriptures: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³²⁻³³ Jesus responded, “The real significance of that Scripture is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven but that my Father is right now offering you bread from heaven, the *real* bread. The Bread of God came down out of heaven and is giving life to the world.”

³⁴ They jumped at that: “Master, give us this bread, now and forever!”

³⁵⁻³⁸ Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don’t really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don’t let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own agenda but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me.

Many of you at some point in time have probably played the board game called "The Game of Life." As I now look back in time and remember playing that game as a kid, I realize it was not about life as life is truly experienced. It was about an ideal, about life as we were told life ought to be.

You probably remember that as the game was played each participant had choices to make along the way: go to college or not, to get married or not, and to have a career that paid a lot of money. In fact, the highest salary earned, the "bread winner" who made the most money, was what each player tried to achieve.

Of course, there were pitfalls along the way and there were also shortcuts to the finish line, with the finish line being retirement. The goal of the game was not necessarily to finish first but to finish with the most money. Looking back on this game, quite candidly, this was a subliminal way to teach kids about a purpose in life – winning and becoming the wealthiest "bread winner".

However, at the end of the game, all that paper money just disappeared until the next time the game was played, and the pursuit of money began again in all earnestness. As I think back to playing that game, I now find it interesting that "The Game of Life" did not include the end of life.

Well into this context in which we posture, the disciples played and performed while striving to be successful bread winners, Jesus had a message for them. Jesus said to us, "Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man providesI am the bread of life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever."

Jesus' message has and invitation to them and to us, inviting us to live into...

- an alternative way of being
- an alternative way of living
- an alternative way of playing this very real game of life.

As with the disciples, Jesus offers us the bread that truly satisfies our beings. Jesus offers us himself, the very life of God's son, life that truly matters right here and right now and for all eternity. Our hunger that seems to drive our way of living will never bring satisfaction and joy.

Jesus will satisfy the hungry heart....

- As Jesus feeds us with himself – the bread of life that truly matters – Jesus reshapes us.
- As we are fed by Jesus himself he changes us, changing our purpose and enabling us to live for others.
- As Jesus satisfies within us the deep hunger for purpose and meaning, we will be moved beyond ourselves, while at the same time awakening in us other hungers.

Jesus awakens a hunger for peace, justice, loving kindness, and a humble walk with our God...the hunger that stays with us and truly matters in our lives. Allowing our lives to be reshaped by Christ, we become bread for the world that can feed and work for healing in a very broken world.

All of this happens not by getting something, but by giving as Jesus has given to us.

- Every time we gather together, Jesus' call is that we come hungry **for** life, and leave hungry **to give** life, full of Jesus, the bread of life.
- Every time we gather together we are fed and nourished by the very life of Jesus
- Every time we gather we are then enabled to live out God's grace and love as where we live, work, serve, and play.

Now, we know that this way of life and being is not always easy. When we live life as members of the body of Christ, we take the way that means that the pain of the hungry person, the pain of the world, is also the pain that becomes our pain. Our empathy becomes compassion, which means to "suffer with". We are fed by the one who brought life and love to this very broken world. And, when we live as broken open members of the body of Christ, the love of God empowers us to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and work for justice in this hurting world. That is what living into the abundance of God is all about.

The food that endures is Jesus himself:

- He is the bread that is broken and distributed for the life of the world.
- He is the bread that is broken and yet never divided.
- He is the bread that is eaten and yet never exhausted.
- He is the bread that consecrates us who believe in him.

When we know the life-giving bread that Jesus offers, we can take him into our lives and live differently....

- We **see** everyone as persons created in the image and likeness of God rather than as obstacles or issues to be overcome.
- We **trust** the silence of prayer rather than the words of argument.
- We **choose** love and forgiveness rather than anger and retribution.
- We **relate** with intimacy and vulnerability rather than superficiality and defensiveness.
- We **listen** for God's voice rather than our own.

"I am the bread of life," Jesus tells the people. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." He is offering the people himself. He is the imperishable bread that nourishes and sustains imperishable life that we can see, trust, choose, relate, and listen.

Jesus makes us the same offer. He offers himself to us in every one of our relationships: family, friends, strangers, enemies, those who agree with us, and those who disagree. In every situation and each day of our life, when we choose the bread we will eat, we also choose the life we want in the Game of Life: The life-giving bread that **IS** Jesus. Give thanks for this Bread of Life.

Let us pray in the words from a contemporary hymn (by Omer Westendorf, 1976), singing:

*You satisfy the hungry heart,
With gift of finest wheat.
Come give to us, O Saving Lord,
The bread of life to eat.*

Amen!