

John 6:35, 41-51

In the heart of a Minnesota winter there were reports of an impending winter storm. Jim decided he had better head to town and stock up on some groceries in case he couldn't get out for several days. May as well stop by the Smiths, elderly neighbors, and see if he could bring them some groceries. Yes, they could use some bread and milk. As he entered the grocery store he realized others had the same idea and were stocking up on groceries also. The bread shelves were almost bare but he did find a loaf of bread for his neighbors. As he was driving home he was pretty satisfied with himself; he had planned ahead and also thought of helping his neighbors. The Smiths welcomed him in but when they removed the bread from the grocery bag they remarked that it wasn't the kind of bread they liked.

Are we ever satisfied? We spend most of our lives searching for that something that will bring meaning to our life. The alcoholic and the drug addict are searching as well as the corporate CEO, and the laborer. We are all somewhere on our journey of searching, whether we know it or not, that searching is for Jesus, the Bread of Life. We fill our lives with things, have you ever gone to the closet and found a piece of clothing hanging there with the price tag still on it, and realize you bought it two years ago? I have, when I purchased it I am sure I thought it was something I needed, that it would make me feel good to wear it. I have never worn it and yet I am reluctant to give it away. Do our full closets indicate one of the ways we are

searching. Are we filling our lives with “things”, material possessions that really do not satisfy us?

There were certainly skeptics in today’s gospel lesson. Listen once again to the first two verses of our gospel reading:

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.”

Rather incredible and wonderful words for us to hear today. The Jews who were with Jesus were shocked that he would say, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” (John, 6:35 & 41) They began to complain about Jesus, his words were blasphemous, who did he think he was to try and tell them God had sent him down from heaven. They knew his parents, this was Mary and Joseph’s son, they remembered him as a child playing with blocks of wood in his father’s carpenter shop. Many turned away and did not heed his words.

Jesus probably knew that many of those who heard his words even today would find them unbelievable. In the Gospel of John, Jesus used the words “I AM” seven times to describe himself. To the Jews of his time it was inconceivable for them to think of Jesus as “I AM”, that was God’s name. In Exodus (3:14) God had told Moses to say to the Israelites “I AM sent me to you.”

Jesus makes it known to us that there is something more important to life than

finding food to keep our stomachs full. We get so wrapped up in life with all the activities we are involved in as well as working to pay all the bills and have a comfortable lifestyle that we tend to forget that this is not our main concern. Jesus is not saying we shouldn't have a good career, a nice house, and money in the bank. What he is saying is that we can have these things but the spiritual bread is what is important.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Our basic necessities for life are food, shelter and protection. Because Jesus knew that the people in the crowd were only concerned about their physical needs he used the illustration of food and then made the transition to a spiritual application. Jesus uses two things that we all understand hunger and thirst. Jesus says if we keep on eating regularly we will never hunger. Eating means that Jesus is present in our lives, he fills that void that we keep trying to satisfy.

When we pray the Lord's prayer and ask, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are asking for nourishment for one day. As Rev. Wayne Muller writes in his book, Learning to Pray, "What is our daily bread. At first we think of food, the most basic of our physical needs. When the people of Israel wandered the desert in exile, they were hungry. In response to their cries for food, God fed them with manna from heaven, bread that 'was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.' Aside from its sweetness, the other distinctive quality of manna was that it would not keep overnight. God, through Moses, told

the Israelites to ‘gather of it, each one of you, as much as you can eat.’ However, if anyone took more than they needed for that day and hoarded a secret reserve, by the next morning it would breed worms and become foul. This was a lesson in trust and in faith, to remind them again and again that God would give them each day what they needed. To hoard more than their daily bread would be to mistrust God’s unfailing kindness and grace.

What is for us daily bread? How do we precisely assess our simplest requirements for a life well lived? How do we honestly determine what is, for us, this day enough? In our hectic world we do not take time to discern our authentic requirements. Instead, we are seduced by the swirling desires of the minds, the rampant seductions of the marketplace, always demanding more and more, hoping that somehow, in the sheer volume of what we acquire, we will find fulfillment or joy.

But often we simply end up with a mess. We hoard mounds of unnecessary possessions and responsibilities, wondering what to do with them all. How much simpler our life would be if we had only to care for this day, to be concerned with this day’s food, this day’s responsibility, this day’s prayer.”

If we are lonely, the comfort of loving friends becomes our bread. If we are sad, we hunger for beauty and light. If we are stressed and overwhelmed we look for the bread of quiet solitude and prayer. If we are tired we look for refreshing rest. Each

of these simple needs is a part of our daily bread.

We don't want to forget there are thousands of people who are hungry every day. Some of them become ill and others die, directly related to their lack of nourishment. For these people, daily bread is not a metaphor. God reaches out to these people in the form of real food. When we pray we say, *our daily bread*, not my daily bread. We are praying not only for our own sustenance but for God to help us provide food for those who are hungry. Our prayer for "*our daily bread*" challenges us to be part of the healing of the world, to imagine that part of *our* daily bread is insuring that those who are hungry receive *their* bread.

In a recent UCC Daily Devotional, Rev. Martin Copenhaver related the story of a gathering of divinity school faculty where they were discussing the passage about the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. The scholars present entered into debate that is common in the academy. They argued about the veracity of the account, its various literary and historical influences, and presented different theories about how the story had taken its final canonical form. Then someone turned to Paul Holmer, a curmudgeonly professor of theology, for his opinion because he had been uncharacteristically quiet during the exchange, seemingly lost in thought. He paused for a moment and then he said, "Well, I don't know about all of that stuff. I was just thinking that if Jesus could feed all of those people, perhaps he can feed me."

Prayer:

Lord, feed our hearts and minds and souls with the bread of life. Through our daily bread may we become bearers of hope and love to the world around us. Amen

Benediction:

May we hear the words of Jesus again and receive the bread that will feed us each day.