

August 2, 2009

John 6:24-35

Bread and Water

Jesus has two major metaphors for himself-Bread and Water: "Bread of Life" and "Living Water."

For all humanity bread and water are essential. What makes bread come alive, what turns juice into wine, is YEAST.

A preacher prayed the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily Low-fat, low-cholesterol, salt-free bread ..."

A member of the congregation was heard saying,

"I hate these modern translations."

Despite such modern translations, despite new diet fads, exercise machines, doctors' warnings and our own resolve, every year Americans are getting fatter and fatter.

The percentage of adults who qualify as "overweight" (20 pounds over the established guidelines) has been steadily climbing for the last several decades --and now weighs in at over 30 percent.

Even more revealing about our culture and lifestyles is the number of children under 12 who now qualify as overweight, or even obese.

Doctors and sociologists blame junk food, the rise of "sedentary sports" (watching television, playing video games, sitting at the computer), and lack of both parental supervision and alternate example for this new generation of tubby toddlers and chubby children.

We're so very good at rationalizing our lazy behavior and explaining away our caloric intake that most overweight adults don't have any idea just how much and how badly they are eating.

Most doctors and psychologists who study eating disorders -- both overeating and under eating -- agree that people tend to use food as a way to control other uncontrollable factors in their lives.

Feeling unloved and rejected?

You might not be able to have a good relationship, but you can have a good steak!

Feeling life is careening at an out-of-control speed around you? You might not be able to stop the world, but you can stop eating and slow your physical body down.

We eat to forget, to remember, to feel comforted, to feel stuffed, to be sociable, and to be empowered. But we also eat to survive.

No matter how smoothly sophisticated, technologically advanced, intellectually gifted or artistically inclined we may or may not be, all human beings -- all living creatures -- must eat to survive.

We must take in nourishment of the right kind in order to keep our bodies healthy, functioning and able to maintain life.

It's the same for our souls. Perhaps that's why; of all the images and metaphors Jesus uses to speak of himself, his mission and his sacrifice, the two most universally accessible and meaningful still remain **Bread and Water.**

Today, just as they did 2,000 years ago, the Bread of Life and Living Water suggest to our hungry, thirsty souls that in the bread and water God provides is the basic sustenance necessary for life.

Bread and Water.

This is the universal "soul food."

What overweight Americans are looking for in their Big Mac burgers, Haagen-Dazs sundaes and Pizza Hut stuffed-crusts is simply found and easily digested in the Bread of Life and Living Water of Christ.

The only diet that can feed our starving spirits and fill our empty insides is "the food that endures for eternal life" (John 6:27).

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

It's both easy and hard to get.

The Samaritan woman at the well, who is tired of drawing water every day (John 4:15), almost didn't get it.

The crowds who follow Jesus in order to receive more free food have trouble understanding how different the sustaining elements Jesus offered them were from ordinary bread and water.

After the crowd compares Jesus' gift of bread with Moses' manna-in-the-wilderness, Jesus does two things.

He corrects their faulty memory -- it was God, not Moses, who provided the manna (v.32) -- and he distinguishes God's "true bread from heaven" from anything that might hold butter and jam.

Pretzel logic male folklore saying that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Is twisted. Jesus taught this wisdom for men and women and took it one step further.

The metaphor of Jesus, the Bread of Life, is a metaphor that meets hungry humans where we think we are empty -- in our stomachs -- but then points us to where our real emptiness lies --in our souls.

Jesus' image goes through our stomachs to get to our souls.

One thing that makes bread such a good medium and metaphor to convey the image of soul-sustaining nourishment is the life-giving process it goes through to become a fragrant loaf.

I have a wonderful memory of being an 8 year old Cub Scout getting a tour of the Wonder Bread factory. How ironic that same building is now the Motor City Casino.

Except for a few special unleavened varieties, what really makes bread for most of us is yeast.

A tiny one-celled organism that grows and metabolizes its own food with great speed, yeast organisms "work" in the dough, slightly fermenting and releasing gases so that the bread begins to rise.

This natural process is common in many foods -- yeast organisms often get into and ferment many things we didn't plan on.

Ever find yourself spitting out a big swig of too-old orange juice?

The taste that tingled on your tongue was produced by yeast. Yeast is ubiquitous. Indeed, part of the challenge of Passover preparations is to create completely unleavened bread (matzo) for the celebration.

Part of the pre-festival celebration involves a ritual "search" through the house with a feather, to seek out and sweep away any yeast that may remain inside and could contaminate the matzo.

Jesus, the Bread of Life, is energized in each one of us by divine yeast -- by the Spirit of God, who sent Christ to be among us, to be for us, to be in us.

To benefit fully from this Bread of Life, we must keep our lives, our spirits, "yeasty" -- vital and ever growing.

What can you do to create "yeast" in your soul? Here's one suggestion. Try using "y-e-a-s-t" as an acronym for your spiritual attitude.

(Y)"Yes." Are you saying "yes" to nourishing possibilities the Bread of Life is offering you?

You've heard of the "placebo" effect.

It's when your body thinks it's getting something helpful and healing, and so generates a helpful and healing response throughout your system.

But scientists are now talking equally about the flip side of the "placebo" effect. They're calling it the "nocebo" effect.

It's when your inability to think "yes," your negative mood and outlook, your worried fixation on worst-case scenarios, can keep the "nocebo" effect working in your physiology.

Believing "I can do all things through Christ" – is a yeasty spirit.

(E)"Energize."

Why is it that the Energizer Bunny that keeps going and going is always going somewhere else the night the lights go out and you dig out your flashlight?!

Unlike batteries, however, a properly maintained yeast colony can keep going and going and going.

Ever make sourdough bread using "sourdough starter?"

Starter is a combination of yeast cultures, water and flour. You dip out what you need for the day's biscuits, bread or pancakes, give the rest of the starter a stir, "feed" it more flour and water, and tuck it back in your frig.

In pioneer days, women treasured their "starter" and nurtured it along for years. Sometimes one starter was passed on from mother to daughter to granddaughter.

That's perpetual energy. And that is what the Bread of Life can bring to your own spirit.

(A) "Access."

In order to be continually fed by the Bread of Life, we must keep in constant touch with the source of life's true energy supply.

Living out of the stored power of the Spirit enables us to be fed by Christ's gift any time we need it. We can access this always available power reserve in various ways.

For some of us, direct intercessory prayer brings us the closest to God's Spirit and God's love. For others, music opens the soul and sets it resonating with the Spirit.

For many, creating and/or contemplating works of art form within us the prayers that enable us to reach out and grab the gift of life. Find your own unique way of accessing the energy of bread ... and you will never go hungry.

(S) "Search."

Today's crowds thought they were seeking the Bread of Life. All they were really looking for was a free lunch.

Jesus' words to them, his corrections and counsel, were intended to make the hungry crowd search their spirits for their true motives and desires.

Likewise, when we feel filled-up with power or contentment we should search our own spirits to make certain we are feasting on what God provides, not on what our own egos or selfish desires have cooked up.

(T) "Trust."

If we are filling up on the Bread of Life, we should be able to trust in the Spirit's presence and power in our lives. It is that trust that allows us to take what appears to others as "risks."

Trusting in the Spirit lets us "go for it" when conventional wisdom or cautious hedging would advise us to sit on the sidelines.

When our spirits are resting in trust, they can do anything. For we know no matter where we go, no matter what difficulties we may encounter, a constant food supply is always at hand, always guaranteed.

AMEN!

