

Title: Feeding on the Bread of Life

Subtitle: Nourishment for Abundant Living.

Video URL: https://youtu.be/kzmvV1IWbM?si=xkR_7G-1w2twm3n

In today's Gospel, the crowds pursued Jesus with such near-sighted focus that they lost sight of the fact that the one who supplied bread to eat was also the one who could meet the deep spiritual needs of their lives.

This event reminded me of a tendency that I have for losing things. I tend to have so much on my mind – i.e., deadlines, books to read, sermons to prepare, stuff about the house that needs to be fixed, that there is little room remaining to remember where I have left the most basic things that I need, such as my eyeglasses, car keys, and essential tools.

Take, for example, my eyeglasses. I have special glasses for being outside and other glasses for long distances. But when I exchange one for another, I completely lose sight of where I last laid the other pair of eyeglasses down. When one is out of sight, it quickly becomes out of mind.

This invariably has me pondering how easy it is to lose perspective on what is essential to our spiritual well-being. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus had just met the immediate needs of a host of people. Then, he uses what he did to forge a relationship where he could point them to their spiritual hunger, which he came to fulfill. He used this method not only with parables but also in one of the previous chapters when he took the thirst of the Samaritan woman and used it to tell her about the water he could give that would spring up within her to eternal life.

In this chapter, he says to the crowd, ***“Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life.”***¹

¹ John 6:27

In their pursuit of meeting their physical needs, they even wanted to come and forcefully make Jesus their king. Their focus on temporal and material needs made them forget their need and inner yearning for a deeper spiritual connection. If “*the work of God*,”² as Jesus tells us, is to believe, then we can’t be like the Israelites in our Old Testament lesson, who desired to turn back to Egypt at the first sign of hardship. The work that Jesus referred to takes perseverance and single-minded effort. But what does such an effort look like?

In our New Testament lesson today, we are given a clue. It begins with the fourth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In the first two chapters, Paul describes God’s plan and his call. Then, in the third chapter, he prays for them “*to be strengthened with might by God’s Spirit in their inner being so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.*”³ But to what end?

The answer is given as Paul moves from theology to practicality. This shift can be expressed in many ways: from doctrine to duty, from creed to conduct, from the Christian’s identity to his walk, and from exposition to exhortation. Paul is talking about making the teachings of Christ so assimilated within us that they become part of how we live. The impassioned plea that Paul gives us states, “*I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*”⁴

The Greek word translated as “worthy” is “*axios*,”⁵ which is the word from which we derive our English word axiom, which means “to be of equal weight.” In mathematical equations, the

² John 6:29

³ Ephesians 3:16

⁴ Ephesians 4:1

⁵ Strong’s Concordance, #516 *axiós* (ax-ee'-oce), **Definition:** worthily (having worth that "matches" actual value

axiom indicates doing something for each side of the equation in order for it to remain balanced and accurate. In other words, Paul is saying we should try to live lives in a manner equal to the great blessings we have received.

His exhortation aims to promote unity through the supernatural qualities of *“humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*⁶ Such qualities are desperately needed in a culture so fragmented as to be in danger of political and societal breakdown. The meekness and gentleness that Paul describes are not born out of weakness but spiritual strength rooted in the life of a believer as they *“grows up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*⁷ This depiction of spiritual growth relates back to the Gospel today, where Jesus said, *“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.”*⁸ Jesus talks about spiritual nourishment that will help you grow into full maturity as sons and daughters of God. Bishop Frank Logan explained what this nourishment looks like when he said that this work of faith

“is not in Jesus’ death and resurrection alone, but in Jesus’ whole life – from Bethlehem to Golgotha, and beyond to an empty tomb and extends to Jesus’ appearances to his disciples, and his ascension to heaven.” He went on to say,

⁶ Ephesians 4:2-3

⁷ Ephesians 4:15-16

⁸ John 6:27

“Everything Jesus did – who Jesus was and how he acted – is all part of God’s revelation to us. We cannot separate one part of his life from the rest. Nor should we have a Christian part of our lives separate from the rest. We are to take Jesus’ whole story and make it part of our entire story.”⁹

The scope of this revelation provides us with all that we need to grow **“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”¹⁰** Admittedly, this is a tall order. And some practical advice is needed as to how to begin.

To begin, let’s compare spiritual nourishment to eating food. Going out for a gourmet meal once a week is lovely, but that would not be enough to get you through the whole week. Similarly, getting through an entire week off of a Sunday worship service is not enough. For this reason, the Book of Common Prayer offers a wide variety of prayer services and lectionary offerings aimed at giving you a daily balanced spiritual diet that will nourish your life in Christ.

On Sundays, in the Eucharist, we meet a God who gave his life so that we might have life and life more abundant. Now, we don’t have to live our lives as one that jumps from one need to another. We can grow as we put our faith into action and connect ourselves with the abundant life that is ours in Christ. *Amen.*

⁹ The Rt. Rev. Frank Logan

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:13