

The title for today's message is: **The Bread Of Life**

Jesus said: **I am the bread that came down from heaven.**

Grace and peace, to you from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, through the power of your Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to the proclamation of your Word, that we might be fed and nourished in faith. Help us to see that Jesus is your Word, the bread of life, who, through his life, death and resurrection, nurtures and strengthens us in our relationship with you, the Creator of the universe, and the author of life. This we ask in his holy name. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning continues our study of the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, which Biblical scholars refer to as the Bread of Life discourse.

The chapter began with Jesus miraculously feeding over five thousand people with the meager lunch of a young boy, which consisted of just five barley loaves and two small fish.

Last Sunday, our lesson told us that the people whom Jesus had fed that day, went in search of Jesus, finding him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

When the crowd approached Jesus, he told them that they came seeking him, not because they saw the miracle as a sign that pointed to God's presence.

But because they ate their fill. But Jesus was asking the people to see beyond his ability to feed their physical hunger, but to his ability to feed them spiritually.

This brings us to our lesson for this morning. But before turning to our text, I would like to share with you a couple of passages from the Old Testament.

First, listen to this verse from the Deuteronomy, chapter eight. Speaking to those who had survived the Exodus, the author said:

“He meaning (God) humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

You may recall that this is the passage that Jesus quoted to the tempter, following his baptism, and fasting for forty days in the wilderness, he was challenged to turn stones into bread.

The second passage that I would like to share with you is recorded in the eighth chapter of Amos, in which the prophet writes:

“The time is surely coming says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”

Now the reason that I share these two texts with you, is to indicate that by the time that Jesus conducted his ministry among the people.

The image or metaphor of comparing the Word of God with bread was a common analogy.

Now let us now turn to our text, and try to grasp what Jesus is saying. In verses 41 and 42 we read:

So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Here again, the people whom Jesus engaged in conversation that day had trouble seeing beyond physical reality. They were from that region in Galilee.

They knew Joseph and Mary, Jesus' parents. Some probably knew Jesus from his childhood, knowing he was raised to be a carpenter. So how can Jesus now say that he has come down from heaven?

But Jesus wasn't speaking in purely physical terms. He was challenging the people to look beyond what they could perceive with their eyes or sense with their bellies.

It was as if Jesus was saying to the people, "We do not live by bread alone, but by the word of God" the same answer he gave to the tempter in the wilderness.

He was challenging the people to come to see that in him, they could truly behold and be fed.

Not with physical bread, but with the word of God. which would end the famine for God's Word that Amos predicted.

This is consistent with the way in which John's Gospel describes for us the incarnation, God coming among us in the person of Jesus the Christ.

In fact, he even begins his Gospel with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

And then he states, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

Clearly, John's Gospel wants us to understand that as we come to know Jesus, we come to embrace the very Word of God.

He wants us to realize that as we come to know Jesus, to embrace Him, to take Him into our lives as we do bread to nourish our bodies, we receive food for our spiritual life.

Finally, although every verse of this chapter is vivid with meaning, I would like us to look at verse 51.

Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Although there are many ways in which we might interpret this passage, as the various commentaries that I read pointed out.

I would like to make my own personal comment as to what this text means to me.

As I have just indicated, I certainly do not see this teaching of our Lord in purely physical terms.

Jesus is not asking us to become cannibals, to actually eat his flesh, his human body.

I would like start by saying that even though John does not specifically mention Jesus instituting the sacrament of Holy Communion.

He certainly knew of, and understood its place in the worship life of Christ's church.

It does not take a theologian to make the connection between this comment of Jesus, and the celebration of the Eucharist.

However, even though John's Gospel does not record Jesus instituting the sacrament, his recording of the Bread of Life discourse,

does give us some direction for interpreting the Eucharist, and its role in the worship life of the church.

I believe that we truly partake of Christ's presence in the sacrament. That the consecrated bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus.

Another words, I do believe that as we come to receive Holy Communion, we are fed with the Bread of Life.

Yes, Jesus is present in this meal, just as he was present that day when he multiplied the loaves to feed that great crowd.

But in order to fully comprehend the significance of this meal, we need to come into his presence, looking beyond the bread and the wine, to behold the Word of God that is in our midst.

When we gather for worship, there is always more involved than what we can behold with our eyes and our ears.

And even though the churches that seem to be growing at this time seem to focus on making their services more entertaining.

And meeting the needs of the people, this lesson invites us to challenge people to be challenged by God's word.

Looking beyond having their physical needs and desires met, in order to truly encounter the presence of Christ.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.