

Title: "Jesus, The Bread of Life"

Text: John 6:25-35

Turn with me today to the Gospel of John, chapter 6:25-35.

-Last week Jesus re-introduced himself to us as the "Light of the World."

Today we are looking at a second of the "Seven I Am" sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John,

-where Jesus proclaims, "I am the Bread of Life."

Here in John 6, Jesus has just the day before fed 5000 people in the wilderness by multiplying the loaves and fish.

-Now many of those same people come looking for him again the next day hoping he will do more miraculous signs.

Jesus knows we all love to see miracles, and that we would like nothing more than for him to do more and more miracles in our lives.

-But here Jesus tells the people of his day, and us, that he actually wants to give us something better than short term miracles that leave us hungry again the next day.

-Instead, what He really wants to give us is Himself....forever.

Listen as I read from John 6:25-35.

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In our earlier Scripture reading this morning we recited together Psalm 23:

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want,  
He makes me lie down in green pastures."

And we all like the idea of green pastures in our lives.

-But in the middle of the psalm we are taken out of those green pastures,

-and we are led into the valley of the shadow of death.

-It is a dark place, a fearful place, a dangerous place.

-There are enemies all around us that are a threat to us.

-It's not a place any of us want to be,  
or would willingly go to on our own.

-But there we are.

Yet, the psalmist says that even there we need fear no evil  
because God our Shepherd is with us.

-His rod and His staff comfort us.

And then it says this: "He prepares a table before me in the  
presence of my enemies." (Repeat it.)

My friends, I want to take you with me to that table today.

-And I want us to sit together at that table that we might eat  
of the Bread of Life.

Now normally, if I were inviting you to join me at a table to eat,

-I would want that table to be in nice dining room, with the  
table set with a table cloth, the good china, and  
silverware.

-Candles lit, the aroma of a great dinner Nancy has made  
filling the air.

But this is not my dinner party, and that is not the setting.

-No, today we are all being invited, myself included, to a  
dinner table that Jesus has prepared for us.

-And the setting is the valley of the shadow of death,  
with enemies all around.

Maybe they are personal enemies, actual people who are  
threatening us,

-or maybe the enemy is death itself, or discouragement, or  
doubt, or depression, or fear, or anxiety, or  
helplessness, or hopelessness.

-These are inner enemies that threaten to undo us.

Yet Jesus the Good Shepherd has led us to this place,

-and is with us in this place,

-and He has prepared this table for us right there.

And do you know what he invites us to do at the table?

-Eat!

-He invites us to eat.

And do you know what he offers us to partake of? Himself.

"I am the Bread of Life," he says,

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry."

I share this with you today, because I have been experiencing this kind of feeding the past years,  
-but it's become more apparent to me the past few months.

I have been grieving a lot of losses.  
-Most recently here has been the loss of Wendell Haskell and Barbara Coyman.  
-Both of whom were significant members of our community here, and significant people in my life.

And I am also grieving the loss of Angelo Stathopoulos.  
-Even though he hasn't actually died yet, he is no longer here, and when I visit him he is no longer really there either.  
-I miss him a lot.

And I am grieving the loss of my Mom in the same way.  
-She hasn't died yet, and I will be going down to see her for a couple days at the end of this week,  
-but she isn't really there as my Mom in the same way.  
-She doesn't really remember our life together anymore.  
-She was the center of our family life in many ways, and we have lost that center now.

And we as a church have lost a significant amount of people in recent years.  
-Many of our younger couples and families have moved away: Nate and Sharon Bodestab, David and Katelyn Durfee, Olivia and Fernando Silveira, Conner and Allegra Davis.

Even Chris and Erica Farrand haven't really been able to be part of us for the past year or two.

I invest in these people and care about these people,  
-and it takes a toll on me when they go.

And you know what else I am grieving in a different way?  
-The loss of my youth!  
-It's just a funny thing that since turning 60 a couple years ago I have been confronted in various ways with the fact that I am not as young as I used to be.  
-Many of you know what I am talking about.

-It takes some getting used to, not to be the “young buck” anymore.

You see, I have been grieving these various losses the past year or two or three.

-And I think the funerals for Barbara Coyman and Wendell Haskell have brought it up to the surface the past couple Months even more so.

So where is the good Shepherd in this valley of loss?

-And what have I found that has been the Bread of Life for me?

1. First, His abiding presence.

When Jesus says, “I am the Bread of Life,” he is telling us that his own presence with us is what feeds us.

And I have experienced the truth of that again and again.

-Even just the other day, I was awakened early in the morning and the words were somehow in my mind, “Don’t be afraid.”

I don’t know how or why I woke up with those words on my mind, but it woke me up at 5:30am in the morning.

-And I was wide awake.

-So I went downstairs and sat for a while thinking about those words, and I thought, “What do I have to be afraid of?”

-Because initially I wasn’t aware of feeling afraid.

But then I got out my journal, and wrote, “What am I afraid of?”

-And you know what? All kinds of things started coming to mind.

-I am afraid of failing, afraid that I will be found wanting, Afraid of disappointing people.

-I am afraid of being unable to help my daughter Sarah in a way that will actually be helpful.

There were all kinds of things I was afraid of when I actually took some time to think about it.

But the Good Shepherd had woken me up that morning to tell me not to be afraid, because He was with me.

-And it's not that I hear from God like that every morning at 5:30am.

-No, what is far more usual is that He shows me signs of His presence in other ways.

I told you I was grieving the loss of Barbara Coyman and Wendell, and I am.

-But I need to tell you that I also experienced God's presence in being with them as they were in the process of dying.

-Times I spent with each of them in the days and weeks before they died were rich and beautiful and filled with the presence and love and faithfulness of God.

-And at their funerals, both the preparation for the funerals, and at the funerals themselves.

-I was grieving their loss, but was sensing God's presence again and again as we gathered to worship and remember.

-Those two funerals were both times for me of experiencing the presence of God in this place.

It was like He had prepared a table before us in the presence of the enemy, death,

-and the Good Shepherd fed us with His presence.

-I hope it was true for you, too, if you were there, but He fed my soul right there in the valley of the shadow of death.

Experiencing His abiding presence is the first part of what it means to have Jesus feed us with himself, "the Bread of Life."

2. And secondly, He feeds us with His promises.

Jesus is the Word of God, and when he says he is the Bread of Life, and that we should feed on him,

-what he offers us of himself is His Word, and his promises.

When I was awakened the other morning, it was with words:

"Don't be afraid."

-And I knew that behind those words was the promise, "because I am with you."

That's why the sheep in the dark valley are not afraid.  
-It's because the Good Shepherd is with them, leading and guiding and feeding and protecting, even there.

So I was being invited that morning to "feed on" the words Jesus had awakened me with.  
-So I went downstairs and spent an hour reflecting on those words, and chewing those words, and inviting those words to work on my heart and mind.  
-And as those words worked on my heart and mind, I was fed by them.

And in this passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus describes this for the Jews of his day, and for us.

In verse 27 Jesus says, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

There's a contrast Jesus is presenting here between food that spoils and food that endures.  
-And in the context, it's a contrast Jesus is making:  
-between the bread and the fish he had given them the day before to satisfy the hunger of their stomachs,  
-and the even better food that he wanted to give them that would satisfy the hunger of their souls:  
-the Bread of Life, himself.

But what I want us to see is that what Jesus is actually offering them that day to chew on was his words to them.  
-He was inviting them to listen to what he was saying, and to take it in.  
-He was inviting them to hear what he was saying, and to believe it and put their trust in his words.

The day before He had given them real bread and real fish, and it was good food for their stomachs.  
-But it didn't last. They were hungry again the next day.  
So the next day Jesus says, "Listen, and hear my words, 'I am the Bread of Life.'  
-Chew on that. Feed on that.  
-Those words are a truth that is food that will endure.

They are the truth that will continue to feed you all the days  
of your life,  
-and they contain a promise that will walk you through even  
the valley of the shadow of death.

“For he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who  
believe in me will never thirst....For my Father’s will is that  
everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall  
have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Do you hear the promise? It is the word of God give to us.  
-And we are meant to “eat it up!”  
-It is given to us to take into ourselves, and chew on, and  
swallow by believing it.  
-His word nourishes us in a deeper way than anything else  
on earth.

So at the table in the wilderness which the Good Shepherd  
prepares for us,  
-what we are given to feed on for our banquet right there in  
the darkness surrounded by enemies is this:  
-the abiding presence of the Good Shepherd himself  
-and the abiding promises of his word to us.

Now let me finish today with one more personal note on this.

The other morning when I was chewing on Jesus’ words to  
me “Don’t be afraid,”  
-I was convicted about something.

When I started writing down all the things I was afraid of,  
-I was convicted that at the root of all those fears,  
was my natural tendency to work for food that spoils.  
You see, this word from Jesus in John 6:27 was also going  
around in my mind because I have been chewing on this  
text in preparation for preaching today.

I sensed Jesus telling me that my fears come from pursuing  
food that spoils and does not endure.  
-When I am living for the approval of others, there is always  
a fear of not getting that approval, or of losing it.  
-When I am striving for a greater degree of control, or the

self-assurance that “I can handle this,” or thinking that if I just work a little harder it will all come out right.

-There is always the fear that I won’t get it right, and I couldn’t really handle it, and it’s all out of control.

Jesus said, “Paul, you are working for food that does not endure. You’re not in control.”

My friends, the food that spoils is all that we turn to in this world to try and feed the hunger we feel by our own means.

-It’s all the distractions we fill our life with in order to avoid facing the grief and loss we endure.

-It’s all the people, places and things we turn to instead of God, in order to try and make ourselves happy in the face of all of life’s disappointments and struggles.

The food that endures is the abiding presence of Jesus, right in the midst of life’s disappointments and struggles, -and the abiding promises of Jesus, which carry us through even the valley of the shadow of death.

For even there he prepares a table before us to feed us.

-For He is the Bread of Life, and whoever feeds on his presence and his promises will never be hungry.

For man does not live on bread alone, but on the word of God that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

Jesus is that word. He is the Bread of life. “I am,” says Jesus. “I am.”

Thanks be to God.

