

# Food for the Hungry

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**Sermon Series: The Difference Jesus Makes**

**John 6:25-35**

***Miracles are much more likely to arise from faith than faith from miracles.***

**T**his Scripture lesson about bread made me hungry all week. I happen to love bread. I find the smell of freshly baked bread simply intoxicating.

I imagined every kind of bread this week. I thought about banana bread, cinnamon bread, cornbread, focaccia bread, garlic bread, wheat bread, pita bread, potato bread, pumpkinnickel bread, seven-grain bread, raisin bread, rye bread and sourdough bread. I thought about baguettes, tortillas, bagels, muffins and croissants. I'm sorry. Am I making you hungry?

Atkins, South Beach and Zone diets had been giving bread a bad name, although the buzz over low-carb diets has begun to subside. Bread remains ubiquitous food in our culture; little wonder that it has been called "the staff of life." Bread is perhaps the oldest food that is still a part of the modern diet.

I want to think with you today about another kind of bread. "I am the bread of life;" Jesus said, "whoever comes to me will never be hungry" (6:35). Spiritual hunger can never be assuaged by Panera or Great Harvest Bread.

At the outset of John 6, Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 people with a lunch-size portion of bread and fish (John 6:1-15). The next day, the crowd continues in hot pursuit of this miracle worker. They commandeer a fleet of boats

to follow him. Pure and simple, they want more bread, as though Jesus is some sort of short-order cook.

Jesus can see right through them. "You are looking for me" he tells them, "not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (6:26).

Jesus shows ambivalence about doing miracles throughout his ministry. Although Jesus is legendary for doing miracles, he performs no more than three dozen miracles over a three-year span.

Sure, miracles attract big crowds, but rarely do they produce loyal disciples. The excitement generated by miracles doesn't translate into life-changing faith. Jesus himself said, "If people do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Although faith may produce miracles, rarely do miracles produce faith. Miracles are much more likely to arise from faith than faith from miracles. Maybe that explains why Jesus walks on water only once!

Most people are attracted to the miracles themselves, rather than what the miracles signify. Jesus calls his miracles "signs" in John's gospel (6:26). A sign is a marker to anyone who is looking for it. Jesus came into this world "so that those who do not see may see" (John 9:39). Jesus said, "Let those who have eyes, let them see."

***These “I am” declarations by Jesus are the most egotistical thing anyone could possibly say, unless they are true.***

Have you ever looked at a sign, but failed to see it? God leaves clues for people. God’s signs are prominently displayed, but people don’t see the signs because they aren’t looking for them.

Jesus’ miracles are signs that the Messianic age has finally dawned. Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, has come. Yet, people fail to see. Theological blinders don’t easily fall off. People welcome the miracles but resist what the signs signify.

With yesterday’s miracle still digesting in their bellies, the crowd asks Jesus in verse 30 for another miracle: “What miraculous sign will you give us that we may see and believe in you?” Doesn’t yesterday’s miracle count for something? Jesus, what have you done for us lately?

They recall Moses’ miracle of supplying manna in the wilderness (6:31), but Jesus is quick to correct them. Moses didn’t perform this great miracle; God did!

Jesus announces in verse 33, “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world” (6:33). Understandably, they answer, “Sir, give us this bread always” (6:34).

Jesus declares, “I am the bread of life” (6:35). Notice Jesus doesn’t say, “I have the bread of life.” He asserts, “I am the bread of life.”

The Greek words for I am, *ego eimi*, are placed in emphatic position in the sentence. “I am the bread of life.”

During Advent and Christmas, we are looking at seven “I am” declarations by Jesus from John’s

gospel. “I am the bread of life” (6:35), “I am the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11), “I am the gate of the sheep” (10:7), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “I am the way, the truth and the life” (14:6) and “I am the true vine” (15:1).

These “I am” declarations by Jesus are the most egotistical thing anyone could possibly say, unless they are true. In verses 35-40, Jesus refers to “I,” “me” or “my” a total of 17 times in five verses. What Jesus is saying is preposterous if it isn’t true. He is not saying “I know where you can find the bread of life.” He declares, “I am the bread of life” (6:35, 41).

This bread of life serves in predicate position for the subject “I” in the sentence. In English grammar, a predicate serves to amplify the subject. Bread of life expounds on the pronoun “I.” “I am the bread of life.” Jesus says later, in verse 51, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.”

There was a time in my life when I thought my hunger could be satisfied by the things of this world. I came to realize that the craving within me was in reality a hunger for God.

C. S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. If I find in myself a desire which no experience

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in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it; that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably, earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”

In other words, this spiritual hunger will not be appeased by worldly pursuits. God feeds the hungry soul. Isn't it ironic in this land of plenty that people are so hungry? Exotic travel and vacation homes will not appease this hunger. Only God can satisfy the deepest hunger of the human heart.

Howard Mumma was pastor of the American Church in Paris in the 1950s. After Sunday worship one day, he noticed a man in a dark suit, surrounded by admirers. He learned it was the famous author, Albert Camus, who came initially to hear Marcel Dupre play the organ but became intrigued with the pastor's sermons, so he kept coming. Mumma became friends with the existentialist Camus, who, by then, was already famous for his novels *The Plague* and *The Stranger*. The two men often met to discuss religious questions Camus raised. Mumma kept the conversations confidential for forty years before deciding to share them. In one conversation, Camus told Mumma:

“The reason I have been coming to church is because I am seeking. I'm almost on a pilgrimage—

seeking something to fill the void that I am experiencing—and no one else knows. Certainly the public and the readers of my novels, while they see that void, are not finding the answers in what they are reading. But deep down you are right—I am searching for something the world is not giving me.... Since I have been coming to church, I have been thinking a great deal about the ideal of a transcendent, something that is other than this world.... There is something that can bring meaning to my life. I certainly don't have it, but it is there. On Sunday morning I hear that the answer is God.”

Camus expresses the existential longing of our souls. We are hungry for God. The words we sang earlier strike a resonant chord. “This is my daily bread.... I'm desperate for you. I'm lost without you.”

If you would like a more contemporary example than Albert Camus, consider what Tom Brady, quarterback for the New England Patriots, says about life. By the tender age of 29, Tom Brady had already won three Super Bowls, an accomplishment that ranks him with the best quarterbacks ever to play the game. Despite all Brady's fame and accomplishments, he told Steve Kroft in an interview with *60 Minutes*:

“Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, lots of people would say that I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think, God, there's got

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to be more than this. I mean this isn't, this can't be, what it's all cracked up to be.”

“What's the answer?” Kroft asked.

“I wish I knew,” Brady replied. “I wish I knew.”

I want to scream. Tom Brady, it's Jesus!

I was in Panera Bread recently and noticed a sign by the entrance: “Bread brings us joy and comfort. It reassures us and makes us feel close and connected to those we care about. It is a gift that fulfills our bodies, strengthens our minds and nourishes our spirits.” Wow, bread can do all that?

No, of course it can't, but Jesus can. Substitute Jesus for bread and it reads:

“Jesus brings us joy and comfort. He reassures us and makes us feel close and connected to those we care about. He is a gift that fulfills our bodies, strengthens our minds and nourishes our spirits.”