

“The Bread of God”

Introduction: There is an old Cherokee legend that has a grandfather figure passing on wisdom to a grandchild. He describes for the child the battle that goes on inside every human being, a battle between two wolves, one dark and evil and the other light and good. The one is characterized by things like anger, falsehood, envy, greed, and jealousy. The other by love, joy, peace, kindness, and hope. The grandchild ponders this for a moment and then asks, “Grandfather, which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee smiles and says simply, “The one you feed.” What kind of feeding are you doing?

When you think about it, there is a great deal of focus in our lives on feeding ourselves. Consider the time you spend creating recipes and menus, shopping for food, preparing the food, eating the food, cleaning up the food, and then digesting all of that food! And then we do most of it again the next day because we’re hungry once more.

Of course, that’s how we feed our bodies...what about our souls? What does your menu plan look like for that? What do you need to eat to become truly nourished and satisfied?

As we open our text, Jesus has just miraculously finished feeding the bodies of a multitude of people with only a small basket of fish ‘n chips. But he wants to take the crowd, as well as his disciples, to a deeper place, to an understanding of satisfaction that goes beyond our bellies. We’ll begin on the lake, hearing how that day of miraculous feeding came to an end. Then we will sit on the shore, entering into the conversation that took place on the next day as we listen for the spiritual nourishment Jesus wants to provide. Lastly, we’ll head to Harvard! [READ]

I. On the Lake

A. If you can remember back a few weeks when we reflected on his feeding miracle, some who witnessed it wanted, John told us, to make Jesus king by force (v. 15). They loved what they saw him do and wanted to use his power for their own agenda of armed revolt against the Roman occupation. Not wanting to be used by anyone for any agenda, Jesus withdrew from the scene and went back up the mountain to pray and commune with the Father.

B. Apparently, the disciples figured they were now on their own and so they determined to hop in their boat and make the seven-mile row across the lake to Capernaum. But when they had gotten halfway there, in the middle of the lake, the wind began to blow and the waters grew rough. Mark, in his account, describes them as “straining at the oars” because the wind was against them (Mk. 6:48).

C. If they were afraid at the weather, they were even more frightened when they looked up from their oars and saw Jesus coming to them. He was not on a paddle board, nor was he walking on a sand bar; he was walking on the water! In the midst of their fear, he spoke words of comfort: “It is I; don’t be afraid.” It was enough to move them to invite him into their boat. When they did, they immediately reached their destination.

D. Did they get any sleep that night? It’s doubtful! I certainly don’t think I would have been able to sleep as I pondered what had just taken place. Perhaps it caused them to think back

through the Hebrew scriptures at some of the water miracles recorded there, not the least of which was the rescue by God of his people as he led them through the Red Sea.

II. On the Shore

A. That journey to freedom in the Promised Land from slavery in Egypt was certainly where Jesus took the conversation when the crowd caught up to them on the shore the next day. When they wondered how Jesus had gotten there, Jesus led them instead to consider what had motivated them to go and look for him:

Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill (v. 26).

Jesus was concerned that although they had witnessed and experienced his miraculous feeding of the multitude, they had gotten hung up on this sign, as John calls it, and were missing that to which the sign was pointing. They were simply looking to be fed by more bread. It was, after all, time for breakfast, was it not?

Now, know that I love bread! I remember as a kid in Cleveland, in the church where my dad was pastor, racing back to the church kitchen with my friends on communion Sundays to snag the leftover homemade bread we had used at the table. It tasted so good! Even now, after our worship here has ended, I'll probably swing through this church's kitchen before I go home just to see if there's anything left of the delicious loaf Beth Cairns typically prepares each communion Sunday.

But it's an interesting thing about bread. While it has a delicious smell and taste when just baked, in a matter of days it can grow moldy and stale and quickly spoil, leaving us unsatisfied and in search of something new. Like the crowd that was interested in keeping their bellies filled, what might we seek to "fill us up?" Like the many choices in my refrigerator, the world bombards us with billboards of options – things to buy, places to go, events to experience – that cause us to overeat, overwork, and over accumulate, while never really satisfying our hunger.

Last weekend we celebrated Rama's mother's 90th birthday. Her two sons flew up from Alabama and Maryland and our daughters and families were there as well. It was a magical afternoon on a beautiful NH day and in the middle of it all she blurted out, "Do you know what phrase I absolutely hate?" We all braced ourselves for what might be coming next. "I hate the phrase 'All good things must come to an end.'" What she was experiencing was a beautiful time with her family which she didn't want to be over, ever. The next day I chatted with her a bit about it, suggesting that her desire came from the fact that there is something we've been made for that's better than a birthday party and which never ends – a beautiful, eternal life with God and his people.

B. Writing in the seventeenth century, a young Frenchman named Blaise Pascal put it this way: "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it never can be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ." As a prayer in *The Book of Common Prayer* begins: "Lord God . . . to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom." We have been made in the image of a creative and loving God and our longings won't be satisfied unless and until we live in a relationship of love and service with this God.

Jesus puts it this way to his disciples and the crowd: “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.” What is that food? It is Jesus himself who declares, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Just as we “devour” books, “drink in” lectures, “chew over” ideas, and think our grandchildren so cute that we want to “eat” them, so must our appetite for Jesus be. When we “take him into our boat,” when his word, his will, and his way become a staple of our daily diet, when we come to recognize that man doesn’t live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (cf. Dt. 8:3; Ma. 4:4), we will find that we begin to experience a satisfaction and nourishment that can be found in no other way.

III. In the University

A. One person who discovered this tells his story in a book published a number of years ago by the name *Finding God at Harvard*. In the book 42 faculty members, former students, and distinguished orators give their personal testimonies that the Christian faith can indeed survive a rigorous intellectual climate. One chapter was written by a *magna cum laude* graduate named Todd Lake, who came to Harvard from California wanting to be a corporate lawyer. He was convinced that religious truth was relative, and that agnosticism was the most intellectually honest position anyone could take. However, through several challenges a variety of individuals made to him, Lake ultimately became convinced that not only was the NT historically reliable, but that the resurrection and the claims of Jesus to be the Son of God were true.

Lake closes his chapter: “In July of 1979, I knelt down in the kitchen of my family’s home in Whittier, CA, and asked the resurrected Jesus Christ of history to forgive me for what I had done to others, and to God, and to come into my life and make me the person God had created me to be. In the coming years, my desire to own a Porsche and practice corporate law withered away. Christ gave me the chance to serve the poor through working with a state senator on legislation to help migrant farmworkers, and then more directly by working as a Peace Corps volunteer. I now pastor a church where we have ministries to the elderly, prisoners, and the hungry and homeless. Jesus Christ continues to transform us, ever so slowly but as quickly as we’ll let him, and to use us to transform the world . . .” (p. 46).

B. Here is a man who discovered that Jesus Christ is the bread of life. His experience doesn’t mean we all need to become pastors and drive Hyundais. It does mean that we come to recognize that knowing Jesus and serving him, however he calls us to, is the one thing provides ultimate satisfaction. As we come to the table this morning on which our loaf of bread rests, may we hear the words of Jesus in the background, “I am the bread of life.” May the Lord Jesus nourish our souls and lead us in the good way that never ends.