



February 24, 2013
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I Am Who the Bread of Life

John 6

Last night 91 high school students and adults flew back from a five night stay in Mexico. We faced more adversity than usual, including the worst night of rain and wind ever. But the kids rallied and we completed new homes for six families. You should be proud.

One of the things that makes it possible for me to join the kids on a trip like this—which I really love—is that we have a deep bench of great young preachers, don't we? I heard from a lot of you that Pastor Megan hit it out of the park last Sunday! Well done!

A highlight for me occurred on the first day as we drove to the job site. The roads are riddled with huge potholes filled with **very** muddy water. It is a Mexico tradition for one van to drive next to the mud hole and for a second van to drive through the puddle and "baptize" the other with muddy water. Tony Omlin was our co-pilot that first morning and saw Troy Tomaras approaching the mud hole on our right. Tony started taunting Troy to spray us... and forgot that his window was open. I was seated right behind him and had the sheer delight of watching a brown, putrid tsunami rise up, sail through the window and drench Tony where he sat. It was epic! Did I see it coming? Yep? Could I have warned him? Yep? Did I? Nope. It was too good to miss!

As far as Tony was concerned, Troy's name was mud. Literally. How about you? Is there a name that is not to be spoken around you? Maybe someone who did dirt to your family... or who brought you shame? Someone whose name--the very mention of it--brings back feelings of pain or loss? Any of you have an unspeakable name?

Well...the Jews have a name that cannot be spoken... for a different reason. You learned it last week. Yahweh—the holy name of God. Graciously, God spoke his name to Moses from the burning bush. But over the generations, it was considered blasphemous to say the name of Yahweh out loud. Any idea why? The Third Commandment. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." Rabbis believed that the safest way to avoid misusing God's name was to never **say** God's name. So they never did.

One last piece of review: do you remember what YHWH means? "I Am." God's name is "I Am." God says, "I am the Ever-Present One. Not the God of the past. Not the God of history or legend. The powerful and gracious God of right now! This moment! I Am!

So, if you were a good Jew, tradition demanded that you never pronounce God's name. Then comes a rabbi who isn't real good about observing tradition. Guess who? And not only does he **speak** the unpronounceable name of God, He calls himself by that name! In New Testament Greek, the phrase is "ego eimi." "Ego" means "I." "Eimi" means "am." Ego eimi: "I am."

John records seven explicit times when Jesus says "Ego eimi." In essence he was saying, "When you look at me, listen to me, follow me, you are following the God whom Moses glimpsed on Sinai. But I AM giving you more than a glimpse. I will show you the face of God in one way after another after another. I. Am." It is impossible to overstate the audacity of this claim: that this carpenter from Nazareth would assume the holy name of God for himself. "I Am." Unimaginable. But that's exactly what Jesus did.

For the first of those "I Am" claims, let's turn to John 6. To set this in context, Jesus has just miraculously fed 5000 with a little boy's lunch of 5 loaves and two fish. The people are so astounded they want to force him to become their king. Jesus wants nothing of it and slips away to the other side of the lake. But they track him down. 6:25-36; 60 & 66.

The people who would make Jesus king come searching for him. They have several questions for him...and they are all the wrong questions. The first comes in verse 25 and it's actually a twofer. See if you can spot them both: "When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?'"

What is their first wrong question? When. "Rabbi, when....?" We are always asking the "When" question of God. It is the question of Impatience. "God, when are you going to heal this illness? When are you going to fix my husband? When are you going to make my kids obey me? When are you going to bring me a spouse?" When the questioners ask, "Rabbi, when," what they were really saying is, "Finally you show up!"

There is only one answer to our "When" question that ever satisfies us. What? "Now!" We want God on our timeline; we want him to work according to our agenda and when He doesn't, we get impatient, frustrated, disillusioned. One of the great things about Mexico is that it teaches patience. In fact, we call it "Flexico." Because things almost never happen on our timeline. We wait at the airport. We wait at the border crossing. We get the best jump on our building site that we've ever had and it looks like we will be done a day early...and then a

storm comes that night, wipes out a quarter of our tents and turns our camp into a quagmire. And we learn to wait. “When, Jesus?” we ask. And his response—always—is, “When I’m ready. So relax.”

What was the other half of that first question, “Rabbi, when did you get **here**?” Where! Do you hear the snottiness? If the “When” question is Impatience, this is the question of Impertinence. They aren’t just asking, “Jesus, when did you arrive at this spot?” They are also asking, “Jesus, where have you been! We’ve been looking for you. We have plans for you! We’ve seen the miracles you can do and we think you have a future in politics. We’re here to launch your career. But we can’t help you if we can’t find you! You weren’t where we expected you to be!”

Another thing I love about the Mexico trip is how Jesus turns up there. In fact, how he is already there when show up. It is easy for mission teams to assume that **they** are bringing Jesus along with them. We will serve, we will share, we will bless the less fortunate by our work and our witness...we, we, we. And then we show up and, to our chagrin, discover Jesus is already very much there... and very much at work. A pastor named Pablo has a church of 75 people in Tijuana and shares his witness with us. Family after family share their love of God and their belief that God is answering prayer. Their children, who live in ramshackle surroundings with dirt floors, no sewer and no running water, are delighted and life-filled and surprisingly joyous, even though they don’t have the things we would normally assume are necessary for real happiness.

The risk of being a great church filled with great people in a great town in a great country is that we become enamored of our own greatness. We forget that it is not our job to boss Jesus around and plan his career for him. It is our job to find out where Jesus is, what he is doing and become part of it. One of the reasons every person in this church needs to be engaged in mission in some way is that it inoculates against the spiritual parochialism that assumes the whole Christian world revolves around our prosperous American selves. It doesn’t... and when we realize it doesn’t, we are either humbled or offended.

The third question is wrong, too. 28. “What must we do to do the works God requires?” If the first question to Jesus is the Impatience question, “When?” and the second question is the Impertinence question, “Where?”, then the third question is the Independence question, “What?” What do I need to do to get things right with God? I’m sure that John intends for this question to be the centerpiece of his sermon, because it is the wrongest of wrong questions and the most universal. Part of our sinful, nature assumes that there must be **something** I can do to make things right with God.

Most religions of the world are built upon that assumption. In San Diego, we drive by a huge Mormon temple. In the airport I spotted a Muslim man. These and all the rest of the world religions—and, frankly, the Americanized version of Christianity—all believe that this is **the** right question: What do I need to do?

What good works, good behavior must I demonstrate—what bad habits must I master—in order to earn God’s favor and affection? This is the Independence question because, at the heart of it, we do not want to depend upon God for our eternal life. We want to be the Masters of our own fate.

“What must we do to do the works God require?” Jesus’ answer is very disappointing for all activists. “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” Notice, nearly everything about their wrong question is wrong. It is not “works” plural, that is a list of good, religious things to do; it is work, singular. It is not the works that **we** should do, it is the work that GOD has done. And the work isn’t even an action like fasting or praying that we can check off our list and add to our brownie points. It is simply, Believe. In whom? The one whom God has sent.

And here we return to Jesus’ common answer throughout his entire Bread sermon: ²⁷ “Do not work for food that that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” ²⁹ “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” ³³ “For the Bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Again and again, Jesus takes them back to an ancient image—one of the most precious stories when God provided daily bread for his people in the wilderness. What was that called? Manna! Every morning, they found manna had been sent down from heaven to nourish them. God did it; they didn’t. All they had to do was gather and eat what God had provided. What is Jesus saying? More than ten times in the Bread sermon, he says the same thing: HE, Jesus, is the new manna... the better manna, the perfect manna sent down from God to nourish them.

Only then do the people finally ask a question that is closer to being the right question. “Sir, from now on give us this bread.” And then he sums up his entire Bread sermon in one audacious phrase: I Am (Ego Eimi). I AM the Bread of Life. Literally, “I am the Bread of **the** Life.” “He who comes to me will never go hungry....”

When? Where? What? Jesus doesn’t really answer any of those questions, does he? Instead, He answers a different question every time. Who! Ego eimi. I AM the Bread of Life. Believe in me. Consume me. I will sustain you. I will strengthen you. I will encourage you. All you need to have **the** life is to fill yourself up with me.

One of the most amazing parts of our Mexico mission is what Craig Monson and his kitchen crew pulls off... in a circus tent, with no running water, no kitchen, no electricity. With generators and propane stoves they serve us pot roast and steak and shrimp and Rice Krispy squares. We come back from the job site famished, and there they wait with a feast to be consumed. And we do! Because we are famished and because we know a great feast when we see it. It strengthens us to

go back out and mix concrete and build walls and spread stucco—as one kid put it, the hardest he’s ever worked in his life.

Can you imagine how sad it would be if Craig and the rest of his team provided that miraculous feast and, when we ambled into the tent and walked down the line, we picked and stabbed at it—a nibble here, a nibble there—and walked away leaving the steaming mounds of food just sitting there? They would be so hurt! And we would still be starving. And it would be our own fault because the feast is there for the taking. But we just won’t eat.

That is the way that many of us treat the Bread of Life. Even though we are starved, we look at this marvelous loaf, maybe give it a sniff, and pass it by. Or we show up on a Sunday morning and take a little morsel and head off into the week, still starving. Jesus says, “I am the Bread of **life**.” If you want to live, eat of me. Consume me. Fill yourself with me. If you do, you will never be hungry again.

Dawn Davis, one of our staff leaders, went to Mexico this year for the first time and worked in the kitchen. One day they decided to take some of the extra bread to one of the families. Dawn loaded up a bag full of loaves and took them to the site. When the mother saw her coming and realized what Dawn was offering, she began to weep. This was just bread... eight bucks worth of bread! But for this mother and her children, it was life. For those of us who are doing everything we can to avoid eating carbs because we are too fat, it was a real eye-opener to see someone who viewed a bag of this simple food as a gift of life.

Are you nibbling at Jesus? Or are you feasting upon The Bread of The Life? On our last day together, I told the Mexico kids that one of the things that made me sad was that when we got home, a bunch of them will disappear for a year. They will treat Mexico as a religious vacation: do some good, experience community, nibble on the Lord for a week... then go home and starve themselves for a year until Mexico comes along again. I begged them to let this be a start of a new way of life. Going to church, going to the Hill, praying and studying and getting plugged in to a LifeGroup. Some will; many won’t, sadly.

And there are many adults here this morning who need to hear this same message. You are nibbling at Jesus on some Sundays, and then starving yourself the rest of the time. Like the people who came to Jesus, you are asking all the questions except the right one: Who! Who are you Jesus, and what does it mean to really believe in you, really know you, really love you, really serve you? You know when Jesus gave his answer to that crowd, some of them got mad and pulled away. He expected too much of them. But those who accepted his invitation to feast upon him—to fill themselves up on him—their lives were changed forever. So was the world.

Somehow, we who have grown fat on church goodies need to catch this glimpse of what real spiritual hunger looks like... need to have our passion renewed for what it means to feast upon Jesus, to be sustained by him, to hunger for him daily, to talk and listen to him daily, to dig into his word daily. Beloved, too many of us are nibbling our way toward spiritual starvation.

"I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry."

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. The miraculous feeding of the multitude is the only miracle to occur in all four gospels. Why do you suppose that is?
 2. What does Jesus describe as "the work of God." Does that surprise you? How is that different from what most "religious" people assume to be the answer?
 3. What is the significance of "I am" to John? When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," what is he saying? What is the Old Testament allusion?
 4. What difference does this story and teaching make in your life?