

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

Sermon

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Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church
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The Bread of Heaven

John 6:24-35

There's something about the smell of fresh bread that I can't resist. I don't know about you, but to me freshly baked bread is a delicacy. When I was in Iowa, several women would take turns baking the communion bread for worship. Some would bake that bread at home. But some would come in early on Sunday morning to bake the bread in the church kitchen and the smell of fresh bread would fill the sanctuary. By the time we broke bread for communion, everybody's mouth was watering. I knew better than to preach too long. The people would have revolted. Something about freshly baked bread that is hard to resist.

So it's no surprise that people might follow Jesus around for another taste of bread. Whether he fed them freshly baked bread or just some other bread, they were well fed as a result. No wonder then that they came seeking Jesus. You and I might do the same. Each may have had her own reasons. Each may have had his own needs. But they came seeking Jesus for the wrong reasons. How else should we understand Jesus' response to their question? "I tell you," Jesus said, "you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." They came because Jesus fed them bread, and not because they recognized who Jesus was.

But Jesus did not dwell on that. True, he rebuked them for seeking bread that perishes. But then he sought to turn a bad situation into a teaching moment. Knowing that they had come for bread, he encouraged them to work for bread that yields eternal life. Be careful what you eat, he cautioned. Instead of filling your lives with perishable stuff, work for eternal stuff. Since you are what you eat, choose wisely what you eat. Choose between food that perishes and food that lasts.

But what food is that? Obviously Jesus wasn't speaking about bread for the body, but bread for the soul. He was telling the people to get their priorities straight, and not to devote their lives to taking care of themselves alone. So don't get all hung up on the stock market. Some days it will go up. Some days it will come down. But the life of faith is much more than financial security. Indeed, trust God and get hung up on pleasing him. And don't poison your minds with partisan radio or TV speech. Instead, spend your time chewing on Christ's words, digesting his teachings. You will be much healthier in the long run. Christ desires that we build a life centered on God and the one whom God has sent into the world. To do that we need to focus on Jesus, to take our signals about what is important from him. Seek the stuff that truly blesses. Get serious about faithful living. Seek spiritual food from the one God has sent. Do the work God wants you to do.

And what work might that be? Just what is the work God wants us to do? What does the Lord require of us? There's plenty of ideas out there. Some say you must speak in tongues. Others say you must be baptized by immersion. Still others spell out specific fundamentals of the faith with which all true believers must agree. What do you say? Must a person tithe? How about ethics in business and government? Does God demand good morals? Just what is the work God desires of us? What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?

That's simple, Jesus responds, "Believe in the one God has sent." Sounds like, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Trouble is that sounds too simple. Is that all that God really wants of us?

Can belief in Jesus be all God expects? Many of us would say that God demands much more than belief. But Jesus, himself, responded that belief was all that God required. What must we do to do the work God wants? Believe in the Lord Jesus, whom God has sent.

Of course believing in Jesus is more than a simple intellectual exercise. It is much more than asking Jesus into your life, although that is a good place to begin. Believing in Jesus involves surrendering to Jesus. That will change the way we think; and changing the way we think will lead to a change in the way we live. Those people asked Jesus for a sign, as Moses had given in the wilderness. To that Jesus replied, "It wasn't Moses who gave you bread from heaven. It is God who gives you the bread from heaven." Notice the change from past tense to present tense. What God did in the past is vital in the present. God isn't limited to actions in the past. God gives bread from heaven today. And those who eat of the bread God gives will be filled with life, hope and confidence, with faith, trust and love.

There's something about fresh bread that is hard to resist. But there's more to life than food and material things. Today, in this place, Christ calls us to feast on him, to learn from him, to draw life from him. At this table is bread for your faith pilgrimage. Not the physical bread, but the flesh it represents. Not the physical juice itself, but the blood it represents. Feasting on Christ, centering your life in him, brings healing for broken hearts, hope for new opportunities, strength for the journey. Chewing on the Holy Scriptures yields instructions for right living. No matter what your reasons for coming to worship today, here at this table you will be one with Christ. Feast now on the bread of life. "The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jesus is the bread of heaven. Learn from him. Follow him. Serve him. He is, indeed, everything we need.