

I am the Bread of Life
John 6:25-35
August 5, 2018 ~ Communion Meditation
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Friends of mine have often teased me that I did not really grow up in America, because just as TV was taking hold on our culture in the 1960's, I was not allowed to watch Saturday morning cartoons or any daytime TV (except for ball games!). We were only allowed to watch prime time TV on evening weekends: Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color (in Black and White), Lassie, Flipper, My Three Sons, Bonanza, and Mission Impossible are the ones I liked most. Yes: I missed out on cartoon characters and the emerging market of TV commercials.

I do remember those "Wonder Bread" commercials though—Remember the jingle? "Wonder Bread...It builds strong bodies in twelve ways." Of course, that was back when commercials actually described the product they were selling (a marketing strategy long-since abandoned). I think I remember it because of the picture of a young child starting out as a three or four year old, and then growing taller and taller and older and older during the wonder years all the way up to looking like a 12-year old. Kind of weird--and fascinating to me as a child. Wonder Bread, with the primary colored dotted packaging is a product that has endured: How many of us have used "wonder bread" to make toast or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, or grilled cheese sandwiches to feed your children during their "wonder years"?

I also remember how those ads used to make me kind of worried about what happens after you turn twelve—no more wonder? No more growing? Is that what being a "grown-up" meant? This past week, I got to experience my first VBS here at FPC. It was a wonderful week, a different kind of week for me as a pastor. I spent every morning, from about 9:00 am – 12 noon, teaching children ranging in age from 4 years – 6th grade (yes, the wonder years). I have to tell you: My respect for the stamina of teachers was definitely reignited. I'm not sure how you teachers do it all day, every day, 5 days a week. I only taught 4 classes that were 25 minutes long for 4 days and I was totally exhausted! And exhilarated. They were so ready to sing, to jump around, and to act out the Bible stories and play games that helped them learn and think about what Jesus was teaching us. On the last day, in one of the younger groups, I was talking with them about how Jesus knows everyone by name everything about us, and one child said, "Does Jesus know even more than grown-ups?"

Abby Hartwig, my high school volunteer helper, and I laughed together later about this question as the class filed out of our room. Oh yes. Yes, Jesus not only knows way more than grown-ups, Jesus calls us to keep growing up into the persons and people that we were created to be. And Rabbi Jesus, Teacher Jesus, knew how to launch and land a lesson like no other teacher on this earth. Lessons that keep growing us, like the one we have today in our scripture. The one about bread.

We know about eating bread. We share this verb with the crowd in our story, the crowd of people who came looking for Jesus the morning after he had fed the crowd of 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. I think Jesus based so many of his teachings around eating for the same reason. Food is a great metaphor because it is so central, so core, so tangible to everyone of us. Even though we are living 2000 years later on the other side of the earth, reading the Bible through multiple translations, we share the verbs. Listening to the verbs this week at VBS helped our children step right into the stories of Jesus calling the fishermen to follow him, Martha doing all the chores and getting mad at her sister Mary for leaving her with all the work to put on a meal for Jesus, Zacchaeus climbing a tree because he was too short to see Jesus from the crowd, then Jesus noticing him, inviting himself over Zacchaeus' house, the crowd grumbling at his bad choice of friends, Zacchaeus giving back four times as much as he had taken. Yes: verbs connect us to the Bible, connect us to Jesus vividly. We do all these things too. We share all those verbs.

Today we get to think about eating. And then do it: we will be eating together at the Lord's Table. What can this experience teach us? In today's story, Jesus makes the leap from the food in their stomachs, the actual physical bread they that he had given them and they had eaten the day before, to spiritual food that feeds their souls: The Bread of Life.

What can this leap teach us? How often do we really "eat this bread" and come to Jesus? We know eating three meals a day, each day promotes healthy bodies. Why? Because eating three days worth of calories all in one day, and then not eating for three days doesn't work. OK: maybe some of us have tried that... So we know how *that* goes. The frequency factor applies to this bread, the Bread of Life. Prayer, conversation with God, on a daily basis is what our souls need. How *frequently* do you feed your spirit with God's Holy Word, in prayer, in worship, in holy conversation with friends; in nature, taking a walk, taking a breath, looking up from our routines and ruts?

Another less in this food metaphor has to do with outcomes. How quickly do we expect an answer to our prayers? How instantly do we evaluate our success or failure at spiritual growth? Whether we try the Keto diet, or Paleo diet, Intermittent Fasting, Carb Cycling, or Weight Watcher's: trying to get healthier bodies never happens overnight. As much as we all might wish it could. The same holds true with The Bread of Life. This feast in a thimble reshapes our spirits over a lifetime, as well. The outcome is life changing, world changing but the path of transformation is slow and uneven. Ask anyone who will talk about it.

Finally, and perhaps the hardest part is this: Did you hear what Jesus said in verse 35? All that Jesus calls us to do is to come to him: "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." Come to Jesus, let Jesus feed you--and your spirit will be filled.

If we are honest, we know that is hard. Especially for grown-ups. We'd rather feed ourselves, right? How is that going for us? Let's think for a moment, honestly how often and what type of bread do we grab and go with most days? Do we choose the daily bread of perfectionism instead? Martha may have been chewing on that one, the day she felt like she was doing everything and Martha was doing nothing. Eating the bread of judgmentalism is a hard habit to break. We all know that. There are others we each could name that. Breads that do not bring life to the world, or to us. Those breads diminish the person eating them. Jesus is calling us here to choose otherwise. Come to me, says Jesus and choose the bread of kindness, forgiveness, sacrifice, hope and truth. Yes, these are *all* the Bread of Life.

Eat this bread, and you will give life to the world. Eat this bread and be changed for the healing of the world. Eat this bread and wonders will never cease. Yes our bodies reach a certain height and they stop growing any taller. Zacchaeus was a full-grown grown-up who happened to be short of physical stature. But he grew taller the day he climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. And he grew taller when he ate the bread of Jesus' love and forgiveness. Walls came down giving life to those folks in Jericho—and beyond. Eat this bread and we can keep growing spiritually for the well-being of this world the God so loved, and Jesus came to save.

Shall we let our spirits grow this day? Come to Jesus and eat this bread. The Bread of Life. The True Bread from heaven. It is ready and waiting for you.