

August 11, 2024  
John 6:35, 41-51

Another week on John chapter 6 and Bread; Jesus as the Bread of Life, broken that the world may feed and be nourished.

If you find John's extended reflection on Jesus and the Bread of Life daunting you are in good company. The Cistercian (Trappist) monk and author and social justice advocate, Thomas Merton's has a *Journal* entry: "I try to study the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel, and it is too great. I simply cannot study it. I simply sit still and try to breathe. It does no good to use big words to talk about Christ. Since I seem to be incapable of talking about Him in the language of a child, I have reached the point where I can scarcely talk about him at all."

As Gandhi said, "There are so many hungry people in the world that God could only come into the world in the form of food." It is marvelous, that God would enter our lives not just in the form of sermons or Bibles, but in food.

Bread is at the same time incredibly simple and infinitely complex. In talking about Jesus as the Bread of Life we are not to in any way denigrate the physical presence of bread, not disparage the sign of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes that sets up this extended discourse. We are not to spiritualise away this event, it is just that the gospel urges to see deeper, deeper, into an beyond the presence of literal bread.

The plot of John 6 you will recall - starting with next to nothing, 2 loaves of bread and 5 fishes, Jesus, in a sign of who he is, from that meagre offering feeds 5,000 hungry people. The response from the now belly full adoring crowd is exuberance. Wow imagine if we can have this on tap, in fact we could bottle it and market it! The goose that layed the golden egg.

But then Jesus shifted the conversation from common everyday literal bread to *bread* –(capital B) as in *You shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*. The true bread is the Word of the Lord that feeds us and nurtures our shrivelled souls.

The people draw back a little, wondering where this is going. And then he turned on them entirely: instead of bread, as in the Word, he explains that "the bread I give for the life of the world is my body." Now he's talking about suffering, dying – and that does not sound anywhere near as attractive as free bread and everyone flees.

At this point, Jesus says for the first time, "I am the bread of life," (v. 35). It is one of several, "I am," statements in the Gospel of John, and the evangelist

uses the “I am” to send a signal to those who know the Jewish scriptures. In Moses’s encounter with God at the burning bush, God revealed his identity to Moses: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” (Exodus 3:6). Moses pressed for a specific name, in case the people asked him the name of the God he had encountered: “‘What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I Am Who I Am.’ He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you,’” (Exodus 3:13-14). John employs the “I am” statements intentionally, clearly linking Jesus to the God revealed to Moses.

There are 7 of these *I am*s sayings and I don’t think it is for nothing that bread is first one - bread of life. God comes to feed us more than just teach us.  
( Can you recall the others? bread, vine, water, shepherd, light, door, way)

And then it gets completely weird, taken to a another level of profound spiritual laziness. the Jesus starts talking not just of him being Bread for the world, but that believers are to feed on his flesh.

<sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Ken tells a story about some kids at an after school program where the local church ran some activities as an outreach to families and kids beyond the church. And after the various activities they had a simple communion service that they invited the kids to stay on for. A kid who had no experience of church was next to Ken and when they came to the words over the bread, “Eat, this is my body broken for you” “Drink, this is my blood shed for you” the kid next to Ken exclaimed audibly, “oh gross”. Quite right. If you are not offended and scandalised you are not paying attention.

‘feeding’ on Jesus is primarily a metaphor for believing in and trusting him. If and when we eat bread and drink wine as a sign of this, it is a sign of our receiving him, of ‘feeding on him in our hearts, by faith, with thanksgiving’. Jesus did not say, “Think about this,” “Write learned articles about this,” “Stare at this;” but He said “Eat this!”

Jesus explains the disbelief he is confronted with the pronouncement that no one can come to him apart from the will and activity of the Father. God is the one who pulls us close to Jesus or, apparently, pushes us away. This outcome has cosmic significance, as Jesus offers bread that does not feed for a day or even a season but satisfies unto eternal life. More than that,

**Jesus doesn't just give heavenly bread; he is the heavenly bread — that is, his very flesh and blood mediates the living presence of God.**

**It is not what his listeners expect and will threaten all the conceptual categories with which they will operate. it is only by God's grace that we can believe it.**

**How is God trying to feed us with the food that gives life - healthy, local, abundant food**