

## Teaching 1: "I am the Bread of Life."

"A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick."  
[John 6.2]

We are in that crowd.

You and I are in that crowd.

We, too, have seen Jesus at work.

We have seen him answer our prayers.

We have known his presence with us through times of difficulty.

He has got our attention. We are part of that crowd.

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.  
[John 6.10-13]

They all ate as much as they wanted.

Five loaves, two fish ... five thousand men plus women and children ... and there were still twelve baskets of bread left over.

We are in that crowd.

We, too, know that Jesus is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

The next day, when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs."  
[John 6.24-6]

We are part of that crowd.

We, too, have been fed by Jesus.

We know that when we stay close to him, following wherever he goes, he meets our needs with generous abundance.

We have experienced what he can do for us. We have been blessed by Jesus and we want more of it.

And we don't always remember that prayer is not a vending machine, but a conversation with the Lord God of all creation.

We don't always remember what really matters.

Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" [John 6.27-8]

There are times when we remember that we can trust God to supply all our needs, but forget that anything else matters.

There are times when we give thanks because Jesus is our Saviour, but forget that he is also our Lord and King.

And there are times when, like some in that crowd, we remember, and turn back to him, and ask him: "What must we do?"

What does God require of us?

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" [John 6.29-31]

We are in that crowd.

We, too, know this truth: that what God requires of us is simply to believe in Jesus.

We are not to work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life. How? By believing in Jesus.

We are in the crowd that gathers around Jesus and hears this truth.

And we, too, have said to him: truth? Is that really the truth? How can we know for sure?

We've said: give us a sign. We've read Scripture. We know that you can do it. We need a new sign, now, to help us to believe in you. Like Moses and the manna. Where's our sign?

We are part of that crowd.

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, Moses didn’t give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

[John 6.32-4]

There are times when we, too, catch a hint, through the words of Jesus, of the glorious truth about all that he is and all that he can do. Times when we feel that we have received a taste of the true bread of God, and we long for him always to give us this bread.

We are part of that crowd.

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty... For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began complaining about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” and they said, “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

[from John 6.35-42]

We have been in that crowd.

We have heard others respond with scepticism to the claims that Jesus makes.

And perhaps, at times, we, too, have asked: how can Jesus be the Son of God? How could God be born in human form? It makes no sense.

We have been part of that crowd.

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

[from John 6.43-52]

We have been part of that crowd.

We, too, have encountered the difficult bits of Scripture - the parts that challenge us, or make no sense to us, or offend us - and we have argued among ourselves about what they can possibly mean and how they can possibly be true.

We have been in that crowd.

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

[from John 6.53-60]

We have been in that crowd.

We have argued about what Jesus said. And we’ve gone back to Scripture, back to his words, hoping to find the answers. Perhaps we read it wrongly last time. Perhaps if we read a bit more, everything will fall into place. It will make more sense, be less uncomfortable, more rationally comprehensible.

But that’s not what we’ve found. What we’ve found is, indeed, a hard teaching.

And we have wondered, at times: who can accept it?

We have been part of that crowd.

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

[John 6.61-6]

We have been in that crowd.

We have heard the difficult teaching, and we have struggled to accept it.

And we have heard Jesus say that this is not something we can do on our own.

We need God’s Holy Spirit to enable us to grasp the truth.

Our intellect is not enough. We need God's help. And sometimes that offends our pride.

For some in the crowd, the offence to their pride is too great.

If they can't understand it for themselves, if they can't remain in control of their own lives, then they don't want any part of it. They turn away.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?”

[John 6.67]

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” [John 6.67-9]

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

[John 6.69]

## Teaching 2: “Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

“Why spend money on what is not bread,  
and your labour on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,  
and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me;  
listen, that you may live.”

[Isaiah 55.2-3a]

What do we work for?

Do we work for a particular lifestyle, with the kinds of possessions and holidays that we really like?

Do we work for other people’s approval and admiration?

Where do we look for satisfaction?

Do we seek it in our career or hobbies?

To what or whom do we listen?

Do we listen to what we’re told by other people, or on the television or radio?

What feeds and sustains us?

Are we sustained by the love of our children and grandchildren?

On what or whom do we depend?

Do we depend on a reliable income and solid savings?

Do we depend on our own intellect and abilities, to decide and achieve what we want in life?

Many of these things are *good* things. Many of them, we should count as blessings from God.

Jesus came so that we might have life, and have it to the full ... have it abundantly ... have a rich and satisfying life ... have far more life than before ... as John 10.10 says in various translations.

He wants to bless us, and we are to receive his good gifts with gladness. James wrote that [Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father](#) [James 1.17]

and we are to give thanks to the Lord for his great goodness.

But there is a question of priorities. Do we care more about God's blessings than we do about his Kingdom?

Jesus teaches us not to worry about the things that our Father knows that we need. Instead, we are to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," and trust him to supply all our needs (Matthew 6.33). We know that he will supply them with abundant generosity. We have seen his miraculous provision.

But we know, too, that although God showers his blessings upon us when we trust in him, that is not to be our focus. Jesus rebuked those who followed him only because he fed them, and not because they understood his miraculous signs; those whose desire and priority was for their own needs - the needs of this life - the bread that perishes - rather than for the bread of heaven.

Because the problem is that we can only take from what we eat the nourishment that is in it.

When we feed on what our human nature tells us we need, it results in a hunger that is never satisfied.

[Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."](#) [John 6.35]

It is only when we feed on Christ and depend utterly on him, that we find life in all its fullness and ultimately inherit eternal life.

Jesus said,

["I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever."](#)

[John 6.48-51]

In Deuteronomy 8, we read that God humbled the Israelites, causing them to hunger and then feeding them with manna, in order to teach them that “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 8.3)

Jesus has the words of eternal life. We are to feed on him; to be sustained by him from moment to moment; to depend utterly on him.

Do we acknowledge that everything we have comes from God; that we depend on him for everything?

In Deuteronomy 8, we read:

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. [Deuteronomy 8.17-8]

Do we acknowledge our utter dependence on God?

This matters, not just so that we can remain thankful for all his blessings, but more importantly because when we know that we depend on something or someone, that thing or that person becomes our focus. If we depend on money, or on other people’s approval, or on career success, or on anything else in this life, that is what directs our priorities; that is the thing for which we work; that is the game whose rules we obey.

In effect, that is what we bow down to.

And the more completely we depend upon something or someone, the more completely we are prepared to surrender ourselves to them.

Deuteronomy 8 continues like this:

If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God. [Deuteronomy 8.19-20]

We are utterly dependent on God our Father for everything: for life itself - our very existence; for the Creation of which we are a part; for every person we love, for every possession we own and every experience we enjoy.

Do we give him thanks for the gifts that we bring to the work that he gives us, which enable us to earn the money that buys us the possessions and holidays that we enjoy?

Do we feel secure because of the money in the bank or because of our Father in heaven?

Do we turn to him for guidance about what we want in life, and for the strength to enable us to achieve it? Do we listen to his voice before all others? Do we seek his approval before all others?

Do we acknowledge that children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord? Do we acknowledge that they, too, are utterly dependent on God our Father? Do we pray for them, and trust him with them, remembering that he loves them even more than we do? They, like we, are utterly dependent on God our Father for every aspect of our existence.

We are utterly dependent on God the Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. He alone has the words of eternal life. He alone is the Bread of Life. Only through him can we receive a true abundance of life here on earth, and the gift of eternal life.

In times of crisis, to whom or what do we turn?

In times of joy and success, whom do we thank? Whom do we credit?

In the times in between, for what or for whom do we work?

Why would we try to feed ourselves with anything other than the true Bread of life?

Jesus says: feed on me.

How?

The answer that Jesus gives us is simple: come to me; believe in me.

Come to me.

Jesus says: feed on me.

We can feed on the Word of God in Scripture.

Jesus says: come to me.

We can draw close to God our Father, through Jesus Christ, in prayer.

Jesus says: believe in me.

We can strengthen our faith as we hear him through the words of our brothers and sisters in Christ; as we see his light shining through the lives of others who love him; as we ask them to pray for us.

Jesus says: come to me.

We can come into his presence through songs of praise and thanksgiving.

The more we acknowledge our utter dependence on Jesus as our Saviour, the more willing we shall be to surrender ourselves completely to him as Lord and King of our lives - believing in him, living in obedience to him - and thus entering into abundant and eternal life in his Kingdom.

We are utterly dependent on God the Holy Spirit to enable us to do this. It is he who convicts us of our sins, enables us to turn to Christ, renews us and transforms us into the glorious image of Christ.

We need God himself to send his Holy Spirit to enable us to feed on the Bread of Life.

Let us pray ...