

What is This Bread of Life in Jesus?

John 6:24-35

Jesus said to them, “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” What does this mean to you? What is the Bread of Life that Jesus speaks of? How is Jesus the Bread of life to you?

[brainstorm with congregation]

Let us pray together, e pule kākou, “Dear God of heaven and earth, we welcome you as the bread of life. Feed us till we want no more. Amen.”

The Gospel of John is full of stories where the people don’t quite get what Jesus is talking about. Sometimes Jesus is talking about water with a woman at a well, but he is really talking about salvation in God’s love. Sometimes Jesus talks about healing people who are blind, but he is really talking about spiritual blindness, not physical blindness. Sometimes Jesus talks about being the bread of life, but he is actually referring to spiritual food and our spiritual lives with nourishment from God. In our story today, the crowds certainly don’t get what Jesus is talking about. The disciples didn’t get it, either. But sometimes when we read John 2000 years later we, sometimes sit back and say, “**Those** folks were silly and blind. We get it. Jesus is the Bread of Life—it is a metaphor.” I think we all agree this does not mean Jesus is a loaf of bread. But what exactly does it mean when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life?”

Throughout this Gospel, John hides the deepest kauna and meanings in metaphors and stories, emphasizing how the crowds, or the disciples, don’t understand Jesus. But if we are completely honest, John does not really spell things out so WE fully understand either. John leaves things open-ended. Jesus stated he is the bread of life, but John never fully explains what that means. We know what **bread** is, and we understand spiritual and physical feeding, but what is the **bread of life**, and how is Jesus that bread?

We know that Jesus spoke in parables, because when we speak in concrete terms about God, our very words limit God. No matter how big we say God is, well, God is bigger than that. Bigger, more all-knowing, more loving, more grace-filled. To avoid closing God in, Jesus spoke in parables. Jesus’ speech about God remains open to God being even larger than our words describe.

And the stories that John tells about Jesus are also like this. We must take a huge leap to realize John is talking about a God that is larger than human language. So John uses language that is very open to many interpretations instead of being specific and closed.

When the crowds follow Jesus in our verses today, they want food. This action is a natural response to Jesus feeding the 5000 last week. Everybody heard about that feeding miracle, and all those who were hungry—and there were many of them—followed Jesus to be filled with bread again. You and I would do the same if we were hungry. This is a natural human response. And yet, when the crowds come back again, Jesus challenges them that they are only coming for the bread. Again, it is true--they are hungry. They ate when Jesus fed the 5000, and now they are hungry **again**.

Here Jesus stops and reminds the crowd they should not search for food that perishes, but instead search for food that endures for eternal life. What kind of food is this? What food endures for eternity? What kind of food in your life endures forever? For me, only love endures forever. Everything else turns to dust. So, is this food from God some kind of metaphor for love?

But before Jesus considers this question deeply, the crowds bring up the story of manna in the desert that God gave the Israelites after they escaped from Egypt. So we need to review that story about manna so we can better understand this food that Jesus talks about and the crowd's misunderstanding.

The nation of Israel followed Moses away from the slavery in Egypt. Almost as soon as the waters of the Red Sea closed behind them, the Israelites began complaining. It's too hot. I'm hungry. I'm thirsty. Where is the Promised Land? How can we worship a God we can't even see—let's make an idol. And of course the oldest complaint of all, the complaint parents have heard forever, "Are we there yet?" God told Moses to strike a rock for water, and then each morning this bread-like stuff appeared on the ground. When they first saw this stuff they said, "Mah nah?" The translation of this word man nah is "What's this?" Mah nah? They said with a sneer. God provided them food for every day, **but just for the day**. The mah nah spoiled overnight and was not edible. If the people tried to gather more than they could eat, it spoiled. This bread from heaven was obviously not eternal or long-lasting—it was **very** perishable. It only lasted for the day. So Jesus tells the crowd the bread of heaven he embodies is **different** than daily manna.

Jesus says, instead, "The bread of God that comes down from heaven gives life to the world." Strangely, the crowd responds as if they understand, "Give us this bread always." As the story of John unfolds, we will wonder if they knew what they are asking for.

And then Jesus ends with another statement that corrects the crowd. Jesus says "**I am** the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Well, I have come to Jesus, and I know most of you have; yet we still get hungry and thirsty every day. So what is Jesus talking about when he says we will never being hungry or thirsty again?

Obviously, just like blindness and thirst and healing being spiritual metaphors, Jesus is talking here about spiritual hunger and thirst—language that means far more than what the simple words say. And the bread that feeds this hunger is our relationship with Jesus founded in symbol of the grain of love. What are some of the spiritual ingredients in this everlasting bread that fills our eternal hunger? Love. Compassion. Mercy. Loving kindness toward all. And I am sure you have many more ingredients in **your** everlasting bread from God. But that is one of the mysteries of this bread from heaven. It is baked for each of us individually, flavored with grace and baked in God's complete knowledge of what we need to feed US. Eternal bread, perfect for each one of us, prepared exactly for each of our needs. Jesus set up the bread metaphor and let it be because our needs are all different. As a result, we each understand the bread of heaven that brings us life in slightly different ways.

While we may need different things from God, this Communion Table is a living metaphor of how God feeds us with God's love. Here is living bread and living

water. Here is our manna, but not just daily bread that spoils, but **eternal** bread. Our communion with God is eternal bread of heaven in Jesus.

Here we are fed by this mystery of the bread of heaven. This table represents the healing of our spiritual blindness. This meal is a symbol for filling our spiritual hunger. This living well of communion is the endless Waiola that quenches our eternal thirst, not with physical bread and water, but instead, with eternal bread and living water from God bringing health and hope and love. As people of God we come to this table of God's blessing and receive the bread of life and living water in communion. Here we are eternally fed. Now we thirst no more.

This meal celebrating Jesus symbolizes our faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is the eternal bread of love. This bread of love and cup of grace comes from God, filling us and satisfying us forever. Let us eat together this loving bread of heaven. Dear God, just as the crowd said in our passage today, "Give **us** this bread always!" Feed us till we want no more. Amen.