

John 6:26-36 (New Revised Standard Version)

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 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. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

When I was just a young boy, a guy in our town had a 1930 Model-A,
and sometimes he would come by with his antique car,
to pick-up a load of excited neighborhood kids,
and take us across town for an ice cream cone.

On a hot summer evening there was nothing better,
than riding through town back in the rumble seat,
and nothing was better than an ice cream cone from Brewsters.
But I never could decide which was better and more fun,
the ride over or the ice cream cone once we arrived.

Obviously, that is a wonderful childhood memory,
but what made it such a memorable and delightful experience
wasn't the excitement of an antique Model-A Ford or the ice-cream.

What made that experience so special and memorable
wasn't any of that more obvious and external stuff,
but, it was that somebody took an interest in us,
and cared enough about kids to make us feel special.

His gift wasn't the ice-cream or the ride in his car.

The gift was the man himself, his time and that someone cared.

In our text last week, Jesus fed a huge crowd in the wilderness

with just five small barley loaves and a couple of little fish.

From a boy's meager lunch, after everyone had eaten their fill,
there had been enough fragments left over to fill 12 baskets.

It was a sign of God's provision and grace in great abundance.

Later, in our passage today, when the crowd catches up with Jesus,
he recognized that they're focus was on another free lunch. vs. 26

Jesus answered them, very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw **signs**,
but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Now the word, "sign" is a very important detail in this passage
because a sign is used to point to something beyond itself.

In John, the feeding of the 5000 is specifically called a sign,
because the point wasn't just to fill all those bellies with food,
**but it was to point beyond the event itself
toward the gracious and loving nature of God,
who sent Jesus Christ to give us hope & eternal life.**

Typical of conversations found in the Gospel of John,
Jesus tries to redirect the crowd's attention
with **a warning that they are focused on the wrong thing.**

Rather than food for the belly, seek "**food that endures**", vs. 27

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the
Son of Man will give you.

So then in the next verse, the conversation continues, vs. 28

Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"

What do we have to do to qualify for this gift from God?

Now, do you see the ironic twist here?

Jesus, the bread of life, the gift of God's grace is already there,
he's standing right in front of them, and they are asking,
what sort of work must we do to qualify and receive for God's grace?

The answer: You can't earn it and you don't deserve it,

and on your own, there's no way you can ever qualify for it. vs. 29

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, **that you believe** in him whom he has sent."

The lesson is about the nature of grace and our God who gives it.

**Grace is about what God freely & graciously accomplishes for us.
By grace simply receive, and it's even by grace that we can respond.**

In the Gospel of John, "believe" is another very important word,
and is way more than simply accepting certain facts as truth.

It means to act on that trust and specifically refers
to where we place our ultimate loyalty and commitment.

**“Believe” is whatever we treasure and hold most dear to us,
and it’s about having a relationship with Jesus Christ.**

And the specific verb tense in the Greek refers to something ongoing,
so it means, “continue the process of believing, don’t stop trusting God.”

To believe, is to trust God’s grace and promises, & then to respond,
**as a part of God’s healing and saving mission to this world,
as an act of gratitude toward the one who first loved us.**

In calling them to believe he is making two critical points:

1st Jesus is trying to shift their focus
away from worrying about their next meal, this world stuff,
toward the more important truth of God’s promises & grace.

2nd Jesus is trying to shift their focus away from human effort
and doing good works to earn or deserve God’s favor & mercy,
toward simply recognizing, receiving & trusting God’s grace.

But in the John story, the crowd is still a little confused,
and so they ask, that if indeed Jesus really was sent by God,
then they want to see a sign, they want to see some proof.

Still focused on bread for the belly, they connect feeding the 5000
with manna eaten in the wilderness during the exodus, vs. 30-31,

So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them **bread from heaven** to eat.’”

So after the feeding of the 5000, the crowd was thinking
that maybe Jesus was the new and improved Moses, version 2.0,
who would provide them with manna or bread to eat from now on.

They were still focused on how to get another a free-lunch.

Typical of John’s Gospel, Jesus moves the conversation yet deeper.

Using their phrasing, bread from heaven their ancestor ate,
Jesus points out that manna was from God, not Moses,
just as he was send down from God,

the bread of life that came down from heaven,
the true bread that endures ... the bread that abides...

... and so it’s both Jesus provides the bread and Jesus is the bread.

Jesus himself is the gift from God who gives eternal life. vs. 32-33

Then Jesus said to them, Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Still focused on a free lunch, on more bread for their bellies, vs. 34

They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

The point of this passage is not about the physical bread they ate,

but the mercy and graciousness of the God who freely gives it,
for our daily provisions are merely the wrappings
around God's blessings & gifts of love and grace.

Jesus was urging them to seek something much deeper,
and to hunger for far more than just food for the stomach.

We too can get out of focus, side-tracked and distracted sometimes,
which is something like caring more about the car we ride in,
than whether or not we actually arrive at the proper destination.
Don't settle for bread to eat when God intends so much more for us.

Life is not about bread that can only satisfy for a short while,
but it's knowing that God feeds and nurtures our souls forever,
and that Jesus is the eternal bread of life, who abides... vs. 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.

That is not to say that God is unconcerned with the material world,
or that God views our physical needs and desires as trivial,
but that God has so much more and far better for us,
and blessings far beyond the materialism of this world.

The crowd did not recognize or see, understand or appreciate
that something far greater than eating bread had occurred.

**And having missed the point, Jesus continues urging them to seek
something deeper to hunger for more than just food for the belly.**
Don't settle for less than what the Lord graciously intends for you!

One time, my boss "invited" a couple of us budding young salesmen
to come to his home for some very early morning sales training.
So Bob and I stopped off at a McDonald's drive-thru along the way
and we filled up on some nasty, stale, cold & greasy egg McMuffins.

But when we arrived,
our boss had already prepared a big gourmet breakfast for us
which included eggs benedict, Belgian waffles and the works,
and so we tried to choke down another breakfast
into our already stuffed & churning stomachs.

It was such a horrible mistake to fill up on junky fast food,
which totally ruined our appreciation and appetite
for the amazing fine breakfast that he set before us.

Sometimes we do get caught up with the stuff of this world,
focused on the temporary & passing rather than eternal & timeless,
so attracted to cheap & glitzy trinkets and other shiny stuff,
that we are distracted away from the blessings & joy
of the blessed life of grace that our God intends.

I am referring to the passing things of this world distracting us,
such as hoarding possessions or holding petty resentments
that interfere & draw us away from what truly matters & lasts,

or on the other side,
allowing our past mistakes, failures or regrets **to define us**,
rather than the gracious and healing love of Christ,
whose mercy makes us **the beloved Children of God we are**,

for our lives to be lived purposefully in joyful preparation
toward the eternal delight, glory and wonder that awaits us.

So as we come to the Lord's banquet Table today,

let us not confuse the bread we eat with God's blessings,
but seek to know, commune and grow deeper with our God

- who faithfully provides for our starving souls & spiritual hunger.

Today, now is a good time to ask, have I been too easily satisfied,
with this world's junk food, trivial trinkets & other shiny stuff?

Today at the Table, let the Holy Spirit speak trust and hope to you,
let the bread and cup awaken a ravenous hunger for more Jesus,
and for the full depth of God's love, blessings and grace.

Today at the Table, consider what it means for you, that Jesus said:

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.