

## John 6:24-35

24 So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 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. 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. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 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? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " 32 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. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 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.

Today is the first of five Sundays with gospel readings from John 6, the first four of which focus on Jesus as bread of life. Today we heard how Jesus feeds thousands of people with five loaves and two fish.

It points out that what we have, what we bring to Jesus' table, seems like it is not nearly enough to meet all the needs we see around us.

I would point out: It is **not the adequacy** of our supplies and it is **not about our skills** that finally makes the difference: **it is the power of Jesus working** in the littlest and least ... to transform this world into the world God desires, a world where all the hungry are satisfied. The Bread of Life feeds us. So, why are there hungry people?

It says in scripture: "You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16) We heard that earlier

Yet, we know that the desire of every living thing is not satisfied. In fact, an estimated 795 million people in the world—one in nine people on earth—do not have enough food to live a healthy and active life. While the vast majority of the world's hungry people live in developing countries, where 12.9 percent of the population is undernourished, congregations like Hill Avenue Grace host and support a food pantry and we know know that



hungry people live in our community, neighborhood, and congregation.

Our God of abundance inspires us in the face of the reality of hunger. *The reality of hunger is not grounded in God.* The God we know in the face of Jesus “looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, [and]... said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’” (John 6:5). Seeing a multitude of hungry people coming toward him, Jesus’ first response is to feed them.

John’s account of Jesus feeding the crowd serves to make God’s abundance even more abundant. The Food Shelf of HAGL serves as a sign of God’s ongoing abundance.

The invitation to the world is to trust God’s abundance in the same way that Elisha trusted the word of the Lord and to redistribute food so that all may be satisfied.

Embracing John 6 is an opportunity for us to **explore the many ways God feeds us.** *God feeds more than the belly.*

The Bread of Life encourages us to look not to our scarcity but to the abundant providence of God. Both physically and spiritually.

Our texts (over the next five weeks) go beyond this important social justice message, they invite us to explore our attitudes regarding our own resources.

On what or whom are we relying for our needs? Where is our spirit in all of this?

Do we have a theology of scarcity or a theology of abundance?

How are you fed in this worship space? How does God feed you when you enter the Sanctuary **and** when you leave the Sanctuary? Jesus was on the mountain; in the valley; walking on the water ... feeding people at each and every place.

The setting of each feeding is a dynamic silent character in John 6. The reading opens across the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1), goes up a mountain (6:3), onto a grassy area (6:10), then back to the mountain (6:15), and finally, to the sea once more (6:16). Even the time of day can be presumed to span morning, midday, evening, and finally, the dark watch of night (6:17). When; where does God feed you?

We can be fed within the walls.

We can be fed in the Memorial Prayer Garden

We can be fed in the gym; at the coffee station; or on the road we travel into the valley or to our home on the mountain face.

God is at the playground, the park and the workplace.



Take time and let the Bread of Life feed you.

John 6 is a chapter rife with significance about our own understanding of the sacraments.

The sacraments hold this unusual place in the Church, in that they are both central to our life of faith and yet also can be so very confusing.

**Baptism:** born again – water and rebirth

**Communion:** fed with bread and wine – body and blood

Consider a phrase from St. Augustine: “visible words.”

This phrase is attractive because it helps us appreciate Baptism and Communion as the visible, physical counterpoint to the preaching and teaching of the church.

- the sacraments are the embodiment of the proclaimed and heard gospel in physical form, the gospel given shape in water, bread, and wine.
- They serve us, as physical reminders of what we have heard and believe simply because we are physical creatures and remembering and believing can be so hard.
- So we have the gospel preached so that we may hear it, **and** we have the same gospel given to us so that we may *taste* and *touch* and *feel* it with our hands and mouths and bodies.

Visible, physical words for visible, physical people. Now, if this is true, then the sacraments will share the same character as the proclaimed gospel. That is, the sacramental word, as with the preached word, will be primarily about one thing: telling the truth.

This, is the truth described in John’s gospel account this morning, as the people who witnessed Jesus’ miracle saw in him their salvation from political tyranny and wanted from him more of his miraculous power, healing, and nourishment. You see, they were not buffoons, or rabble, or miscreants. They were faithful people, for when they saw the mighty deeds of Jesus they perceived him to be from God, and *“from God” – especially in this chapter, meant* to them a mighty prophet like Moses, who would deliver them from Rome and restore Israel to glory just as Moses had delivered the Israelites from Egypt.



And it's at this point that Jesus withdraws. For he would not be king on their terms... or on anyone else's. Christ's word to these faithful people was harsh; for it was the word, "No." No to all their ambitions and delusions of power and control. And here's the thing: Christ says the same thing to us.

For this very reason do we baptize infants. For children simply have no say in the matter of their baptism. **God**, through their parents and the church, chooses them. God, that is, unilaterally chooses to make us his own, to love and cherish us no matter what we may experience later in life, no matter what our attitude may be toward God or the Church, no matter what we may say or do, God just goes ahead and chooses us to receive the new life of Christ in Holy Baptism.

Holy Communion is of the same character. For when we come to the table of our Lord, we come on God's terms, not ours. For Christ comes to us in Holy Communion bodily, physically, visibly, first to say "no" — no to our desire to be in control, no to the people we wish we were or we wish everyone thought we were — so that we might then hear Christ's "yes" to the person we actually and already are, the person for whom Christ died and to whom he now gives the gift of his body and blood.

At the altar, all pretense must give way, for when we gather round this Table on our knees with our hands up and mouths open, we are as naked and need, helpless and powerless as a baby about to be baptized. And yet it is precisely these helpless and uncomprehending persons — all of us — to whom Christ comes and from whom Christ will never draw away.

And so, what is difficult about Communion and Baptism, in the end, is very simple: we had and have nothing to do with it, not really. It is God's action of mercy and grace alone; and so, we can neither take credit for it nor control it. But this is also what is so crucial about our sacraments, for precisely because they are God's work and not our own we can trust them.

When all else fails, our relationships or our sources of security, our health or even life itself — when *we* fail — God's promise yet stands firm.

God's word to us in Baptism and Communion remains faithful, calling us ever back to who we really are in God's eyes,

We are God's beloved and holy children fed by the Bread of Life.

