

Lent in Plain Sight: Bread
I am the bread of life...John 6:35
First in a Lenten Series
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Intro - There is a story of a woman, who set out to answer the question “what is the meaning of life?”. She read every spirituality book she could get her hands on. She attended lectures. She talked to learned scholars. Finally, she decided there was nothing else to do but sell all she had and travel the world, asking those she met about the meaning of life.

She heard rumors of one who lived in a distant land and knew the answer, but she could never find her. Finally, in a tiny hut in the Himalayas, she found the wise teacher, squatting by the fire.

The wise old woman invited her in for tea. “No,” the other woman said, “I did not come for tea, I came to seek the meaning of life.”

The old woman insisted she come in, and finally, the woman did. Suddenly she felt a compulsion to talk to the teacher, to pour out to her all that was on her heart. She did just that for many long minutes, never giving her a chance to respond.

Without a word, the wise one began pouring her some tea. Oblivious, she kept on talking. She didn’t notice when her cup became full. She noticed it only when the hot liquid flowed over the top of the cup and began to burn her hand.

“Stop,” she shouted out, “there’s no more room!”

“Just so,” said the learned sage. “You came here wanting something from me, but what was I to do? There is no more room in your cup. Come back when it is empty and then we'll talk.”

We can never be filled without first being emptied and acknowledging our true hunger and thirst.

Many of us today are like the woman seeking answers to our hunger; wanting a sign or some kind of assurance and certainty. We so often fill our cups with so much of the wrong, misguided, well intentioned but lacking things of life that we forget what it was we were hungry for. We are so full of our own agendas, busyness, and distractions and so busy pursuing what we think will satisfy the longing inside that we just keep stuffing ourselves with empty satisfaction.

Now is the time to pour out the cup of self and remember our innermost desire; what it is we were designed to hunger for and what it is that is at the center of our hunger. It is a time to be emptied of our false self and the false narratives we listen to and consider what and who we align ourselves; what and who we run to to satisfy our hunger and thirst.

Prayer - Dear Jesus, may we come to understand our hunger for life can only be satisfied by you. May these forty days feed us in ways we both need and could never have imagined. Amen.

Message - Last Wednesday started the time of year the church calls, Lent. Forty days (not counting Sundays) before Easter. It is a season to examine our lives; to ask yourself questions like: Who am I? What do I value most? Who and what brings meaning and purpose to my life, how do I add value to the world around me? Who am I as a follower of Jesus? How does following Jesus shape my life? How do I understand my relationship with Jesus, when do I feel closest to God? What am I doing or not doing to spend time with God, grow in my faith and develop my spiritual habits or practices? What does it mean to love as Jesus loved? What is the meaning of sacrifice? What is the meaning of my life?

That is a lot of questions to reflect on and that is the point. Lent is a time to take inventory of yourself by remembering and meditating on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Lent is a metaphorical walk through the wilderness of self-based on the wilderness experience of the People of Israel in the desert; forty years of wondering and questioning. We spend time looking at the things, people, experiences, distractions, temptations, shortcomings, circumstances, failures, and situations that make up life and measuring all that alongside the wilderness experience of Jesus. We look at what his experience reveals to us through his temptation, his struggle and sacrifice, and ultimately his death and resurrection. The goal is an intentional walk with Jesus to the cross.

This year, you are invited to take that walk and learn to recognize the work of Jesus, and to see the presence of God in plain sight. In her book, Jill Duffield, identifies the way in which God works through the ordinary. She states, “God is often at work through ordinary people and ordinary objects. God communicates, reveals, saves, and reconciles through the mundane.” Each week we will take a

look at one of those objects and consider how it reveals the grace, presence, and work of Jesus.

We begin with bread and that takes us back to where we started: What are you hungry for? What is that ache in the pit of your stomach or the gnawing in your soul? What would it take or what sign are you looking for to address the hunger pangs you feel when you look at your life, your family, our community, the church, the state of our world, and any number of other situations and circumstances around the nation and world.

It wouldn't take long to go around this room or take suggestions from online to fill a page (or more) of what people hunger for. If what I hear as a pastor is accurate, people are hungry for honesty; just be honest with me. People are hungry for kindness; can't we all just get along? People are hungry for acceptance, truth, balance, good health, a sense of hope, a sense of normal, a sense of direction, answers, unity, energy, peace and quiet, love, respect, compassion, and purpose.

Those are the same things the people of God hungered for long ago. The same things the first followers of Jesus hungered for and the same things the crowds that gathered to listen and watch Jesus hungered for. They wanted a sign to satisfy their hunger and need of assurance, direction, and purpose. We have been asking God and Jesus to satisfy the hunger in our souls since things went bad in the garden and Adam and Eve were hungry for more and tried to satisfy that hunger with everything but God.

We do the same thing, don't we? We feast on accomplishments, accolades, and attainment. We fill our plates with distraction, entertainment, and collectables. We top it off with a bowl full of complaints, comparisons, and criticism. We lick our plate clean like a competition or soak up the crumbs with judgment, cynicism, and resentment. Then we get up from the table and wonder why we don't have room for anything else or why we are hungry again in a couple of hours. We keep looking for more.

We are hungry because we, like believers before us, seek after Jesus, even follow him, observing his example, tasting his words, sipping on his truths, and yet fail to realize the fullness of who Jesus was and is. So often we fail to comprehend that it is not just his actions and his words, but who he is that ultimately satisfies our hunger for meaning, purpose, identity, belonging, hope, community, and life abundant.

That is the core of John's message found in chapter six, particularly verse 35-37. These significant verses are the climax of the chapter. Staying with the food analogy, we can think of chapter six as a full three course meal. May John's words feed not only our mind but our soul as well.

READ TEXT - John 6:35-38 MSG

It helps to understand Jesus' proclamation of being the "bread of life" if we see them in the larger context of this particular section of scripture. John is a masterful artist. Here he paints a beautiful picture using what Jesus did to reveal who Jesus was. It's like one of those photos you see that when you are close up you see individual faces, objects, or scenes and then when you step back you see

them become one image, revealing something larger, something deeper, more meaningful. In this case, John uses the events, actions, and interactions of Jesus with those who follow him, those who are interested and fascinated by him, and creates a wider, deeper, more complete picture of who he is.

Jesus' proclamation of being the bread of life is found within a set of three experiences, "signs," or moments in which Jesus interacts with the people. Earlier in John, we read of Jesus feeding the large crowd - physical nourishment. We then read of Jesus walking on water - a display of his power. Next he proclaims he is the bread of life, which is immediately followed up with him stating he is not only fulfilling the will of God, he *is* the will of God. He did not come with his own agenda but with the will of God. Jesus did not satisfy their physical hunger only to show what he could do or to flex his divine muscle. He wanted them to come and see that their physical hunger was only made complete when their spiritual hunger was satisfied in him, the son of God. It is not only what he did, it is who Jesus was - the fulfillment and very presence of God. That is our true sign and source of complete satisfaction.

Bread sustains life. Without it, life can not go on. And Jesus wants our life to be more than physical existence. Jesus wants for us a full and abundant life in relationship with him. This passage tells us that without Jesus there may be existence, but not life. We can exist and fill ourselves with things we think sustains life, but only Jesus can satisfy our soul hunger. "One commentator put it this way: The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ and through him, we know God. The restless soul is at rest; the hungry heart is satisfied."

The loaf of bread on the shelf. The breadstick next to the salad. The rolls waiting to be passed. Warm biscuits waiting to be buttered. A slice of toast. Jesus in plain sight.

A loaf of bread. A cup of wine. Nourishment for the soul.

A loaf of bread. A cup of wine. Food to sustain more than our body.

A loaf of bread. A cupe of wine. Jesus in plain sight.

Amen

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Duffield, Jill. *Lent in Plain Sight - A Devotion Through Ten Objects*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020.

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