

“Wonder Bread”

John 6:1-34

6/17/18

I'll start this sermon with a confession. I know nothing about cooking. I can grill a burger or fry an egg, but that's about it. Fortunately for me, Bonnie is very good cook and doesn't mind cooking for us! I guess because of my gourmet ineptitude, I have been amazed at the surge in cooking shows and books and blogs seemingly everywhere you look! Some are wide-ranging, others specialize in cooking from particular places or particular kinds of food, and some are all about the big personalities of the celebrity chef. All celebrate food.

In this morning's passage from John 6, Jesus is involved in hosting some people for a meal. But it's nothing like you've even seen on TV! Here's the set-up.

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. (John 6:1-4)

We left Jesus in Jerusalem in chapter 5, debating with the Jewish leaders about his identity after he broke several of their Sabbath laws. He has now returned north to Galilee, where he is very popular. He appears to want a little downtime with the disciples, so he retreats with them up the

mountain. John also points out that it was the time of the Passover, and several Passover themes will surface in the stories that follow.

⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” (John 5:5-9)

Jesus wants to feed the hungry crowd, a crowd by the way, which has just interrupted his downtime with the disciples! As always, Jesus is in control, knowing what he is going to do. He decides to see what kind of faith his disciples have, so he asks Philip, who hailed from this area of Galilee, about where they can buy bread to feed all these people. Philip simply rejects Jesus’ idea of feeding the people, saying it’s way too expensive. Andrew, however, offers a few meager resources, bringing what little he has to Jesus, which is always a good idea. However, he quickly adds that it is far too little to do any good. I’m guessing that Jesus was hoping that one of them would say something like, “Well, this looks impossible to us, Jesus, but from what we’ve seen from you so far, maybe

it isn't impossible for you! What do you want us to do?" You know, showing a little faith! That didn't happen, so here's what Jesus did.

¹⁰Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all.¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost."¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:10-15)

Jesus has the disciples help get the people seated. Notice the language describing the miracle. Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, and distributes it. It is very much like the language of the Lord's Supper, isn't it? And Jesus provides so much food that everyone is satisfied and there are leftovers! It's like a Passover feast! Keep in mind that these were people who often didn't have enough to eat. It's hard to imagine the anxiety that would create. That's why they pray for their daily bread in the Lord's

Prayer. But Jesus demonstrates that he is someone who can give them security- that he could provide food whenever they need it! The peoples' reaction is to say that Jesus is "the prophet," the one referred to in Deuteronomy who would be like Moses, a central Passover figure. And then they take it a step further. Believing that Jesus is the Messiah, they are about to take him by force and make him their king, presumably to act like Moses did at the first Passover and liberate them from their oppressor, Rome. They have the right idea, but the wrong application. Jesus isn't that kind of king.

You see, the people want to use Jesus for their own purposes, something that people have wanted to do ever since! Political leaders from the Emperor Constantine to kings during the Crusades to the kings and queens of England to the leaders of North and South in this country during the Civil War to contemporary political leaders have wanted to use Jesus to baptize their causes or unite their kingdoms or rally their people. On an individual level, we also like to use Jesus for our own purposes- to bless our decisions and to take our side in conflicts. But Jesus won't be used for our purposes! Jesus has his own purpose, his own cause. It is to bring about the Kingdom of God, to see that the will of the Father is done everywhere. And he wants to enlist us in his cause, not the other way around.

But there's more in this chapter. Listen to what happens next!

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going. (John 6:16-21)

Wow! Even though it is told in a fairly matter-of-fact way, this sign or miracle is also important. John is always answering the question, "Who is this Jesus?" This sign shows Jesus' power over nature itself, and we could preach a whole sermon on just these verses! But we won't spend any more time on this one, because its main function in the chapter is to get Jesus from one side of the lake to the other.

In the next few verses, the crowds, the same ones who thought Jesus would make a great king, are determined to find him, and they go to a good bit of trouble to do so. Then we come to verse 25.

²⁵When 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. ²⁷Do 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.”

²⁸Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (John 6:25-29)

A conversation now begins that takes us through the end of chapter 6, reflecting on the meaning of the sign of feeding the 5000. This is very typical of the way John tells the story of Jesus- Jesus performs a sign or miracle, and then reflects at length on what that sign means. In this case Jesus begins by mildly rebuking the crowd for searching for him only because he filled their stomachs. Then he tells them not to work for that kind of food, but for a food that endures eternally- a food that the Son of Man will give them.

They want to know how to do Godly works. Jesus tells them, as he has told them before, that their “work” is to believe in the one God has sent, to entrust their lives to him! “Well,” they naturally respond, “how do we know you’re the one God has sent?”

³⁰So 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?” ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³²Then 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. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” (John 6:30-34)

They want another sign! That seems pretty nervy after what they’ve just seen, but their logic goes something like this: If Jesus is the promised prophet, the Messiah, then he is greater than Moses, who they remember gave the entire nation of Israel bread from heaven called “manna” every day and sustained them for forty years in the wilderness after the first Passover. Can Jesus do that? Jesus tells them that they’ve got it all wrong. It wasn’t Moses, but God who provided the food to the people, and God is now giving them the true bread from heaven. They want some of that bread for themselves!

If you’ve been paying attention in John’s gospel, this exchange should remind you of another conversation back in chapter 4 between Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus talked about giving her living water and she, thinking he’s talking about tangible H₂O, asks for some.

The same thing is happening here. Jesus promises them true bread and the crowd is thinking about Wonder Bread, and missing what Jesus is really talking about. And what is he talking about? Unfortunately, we've run out of time, so we're going to end it right here and pick up the rest of the discussion next Sunday! You'll find out then, what Jesus is talking about. And, I warn you, it's going to get very interesting and even a little distressing.

In the meantime, we can ponder Jesus' warning that pursuing the things of this world, be that food or drink or money or possessions, will not ultimately satisfy us. The entire advertising industry works overtime to convince us that material stuff can meet our spiritual needs for security, satisfaction, self-esteem, and meaning in life. But the reality is that there is nothing we can buy that will fulfil any of those needs. Those spiritual needs can only be met with spiritual resources, and they are freely offered to us by Jesus.