

John 6:25-36, 49-59
I AM the Bread of Life
Sunday August 5th, 2018

The Gospel of John in my thinking is the most profound of the 4 New Testament Gospels. Every passage speaks about God and our human condition on multiple levels. Single words carry both physical and spiritual content and meaning. The book itself is exquisitely written. There are a series of “7 signs”, what some simply call miracles. There are “7 I AM” statements each revealing a deeper understanding of God.

The number 7 is important, because in the numerology of the day it was a symbol of perfection or completeness. To accept these 7 signs is to accept completely that Jesus is the Christ. To accept the 7 I AM statements is to accept completely that Jesus the Christ is God!

As you can see from the cover of our bulletin, that Jesus, by using the “I AM” statements was alluding to **the “Great I AM”, God**. He is claiming to be God and each statement deepens our understanding of God and ourselves.

To know God is to know ourselves. To understand God is to understand ourselves. In essence this series attempts to answer two questions: Who is God? And then “Who does this make us to be?” This is from the understanding that we are made in the image of God.

So Jesus said. **I AM the Bread of Life**”. Jesus spoke these words with the backdrop being the Sea of Galilee. All of the events of Chapter 6 of John happen in and around the Sea of Galilee.



The story begins in the town of Tiberias that sits on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

It ends in the town of Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea. This isn't a large body of water like we would think of as a sea. In fact in the Bible, the Sea of Galilee is also referred to as Lake Gennesaret. It is about 7 ½ miles wide and 13 miles long with a shore line of about 32 miles. You can walk from Tiberius to Capernaum in about 4 hours.

In Tiberius, Jesus taught the crowds and then performed "the sign" of the feeding of the 5000. As much as Jesus taught of the spiritual he did not neglect the physical needs of the people. That night Jesus came to his disciples walking on the water and they wind up in Capernaum. When the crowd figured out Jesus had left Tiberius they followed him to Capernaum.

In this chapter Jesus was teaching first to the crowds, then to the Jews and finally to his closest disciples in the Synagogue in the city of Capernaum.



My wife and I on a trip to Israel stood in the synagogue built on top of the one Jesus spoke at in our story today. It is only about 200 yards from the waterline.

Now the crowds followed Jesus from Tiberius to Capernaum not because they had witnessed a miracle and understood the meaning of it. They followed Jesus because they simply wanted more free bread. Jesus acknowledged that in vs. 26, *"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."*

Jesus also recognized the walk or work it took to find him. It took half a day's walking in the hopes of receiving one day's worth of food. So Jesus continued on in verse 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."*

Immediately the crowd keyed in on two things. First, Jesus said, “works” and they assumed he meant good works, so they were waiting for the list of “good” things they had to do in order to receive eternal life; so second, when they realized what he was talking about in terms of “works” was to believe in him, they demanded another sign from him.



They had already seen and experienced the feeding of the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, but that wasn't enough for them. That was a free lunch and they wanted more!! Indeed it was a miracle, but to them it wasn't a sign. They had seen the miracle but it hadn't inspired faith in them. They did not believe in Jesus.

In John the heart of understanding faith is the linkage between seeing and believing. They had seen the miracle but hadn't believed and that is what Jesus points out in verse 36, **“you have seen me and yet do not believe.”**

This linkage of seeing and believing is what leads to the great promise of this chapter in verse 40 when we see and believe in Jesus, ***“This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”***

In fact a major take away from our reading today is that if we see and believe in Jesus. If we ***“eat of Jesus flesh and drink his blood we will have eternal life.”***

But to “eat Jesus flesh and drink Jesus' blood” is not quite the way you think and is a deeper metaphor than simply the remembrance of Jesus in Holy Communion today.

This is Jesus' first “I am” statement in the Gospel of John that Jesus uses to explain who he is. And remember we are looking at

Jesus' "I am" statements as a way of finding out who we are to be and become as his followers. The "I am" statements form the distinctive core of Jesus' language of self-revelation..." NIB Luke/John p. 601

In other words, in the 7 "I am" statements we find out who Jesus is from his very own words! In these statements, "Jesus declares that people's religious needs and human longings are met in him." "They also... suggest that no one title or tradition can contain the totality of Jesus' identity." In fact we need the Holy Spirit in our lives to truly understand who Jesus is and when we see and know him; we know ourselves for we are made and remade in his image.

In the story before our text today, the crowd actually tried to force Jesus to become their King/Messiah after he fed them with the 5 loaves and two fish, but he slipped away.

So when the crowd found Jesus in Capernaum the discussion of Moses and the Manna in the wilderness began, because they wanted an ongoing supply of free bread. They wanted Jesus to supply the entire Jewish nation with bread like they claimed Moses did for 40 years in the wilderness.

In verse 35 is where we see Jesus actually stating He is **the Bread of Life**. Bread in those days was so vital for life. It was so rich in life giving nutrients that it was a daily staple in the life of the people. Bread became, in fact, was a symbol for all things necessary for life. So the first level of meaning of Jesus as the bread of life is that he gives everything necessary for life in this world.

As a result Jesus taught us to pray for our 'daily bread', our daily sustenance. But the life Jesus spoke of here was not just for this world, it was also for the world to come. He points out later that those who ate the manna in the wilderness died but those who eat of the "bread of life" would never die.

Jesus does not back down from the argument but even makes a bigger claim in verse 46 that he has seen God. And to emphasize the implications of this, that he is One with God, he continues on by saying,

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever;

and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Vs 54 & 55 *"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life,*

and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."

Now you and I we see allusions to Holy Communion here. But to Jesus' hearers they heard a claim to being God! In Jesus' day when worshippers went to a pagan temple to worship they would sacrifice an animal and burn up part of it. They would give part of it to the priest/priestess and then sit down and eat the rest.

They believed when they sacrificed an animal part of the spirit of the god came to be in the dead animal, so that when they consumed the animal the god came to be inside them. You can see then the claim that Jesus is making, to being a God is what Jesus' Jewish and pagan hearers heard.

Jesus then makes the claim stronger, in verse 56 & 57 he says,
Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me,

and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

Jesus' last supper is not recorded in the Gospel of John. It is recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but not John and when you carefully and deeply study the above passage and know when it was written you understand why.

As time passed after Jesus' ascension, misunderstandings of Holy Communion began to grow. Some saw it as simply a remembrance of Jesus. Some saw it as a magical act if you participated in it you got

your salvation ticket punched to heaven and nothing more was needed.
“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day;”

But John saw Holy Communion as a time in which Christ was truly present. We get that sense when Jesus says in verse 54 those who **“eat my flesh and drink my blood ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN THEM.”** Christ is present in the breaking of the bread as it is called, but bread, the receiving of sustenance happens not only in church. For most of us the breaking of bread occurs three times a day.

So in prayer and thanksgiving, recognizing Christ’s presence, we can celebrate Communion any time we break bread.



Any time we eat, any time we drink wine or juice we can celebrate communion with Christ. John wanted us to remember and celebrate the presence of Christ in the world with us anytime we broke bread.

John did not want us to believe or think that it is only in Church, or in worship, that Christ is present with us giving us the bread of life. Christ goes with us into the world and all we need to do is recognize him abiding in us, being present with us.

We then turn Communion, into not just a remembrance of Christ, but a time in which we take the Bread of Life into the world. We remember Christ in the breaking of the bread that declares Christ’s death until he comes again. And we can do this at every meal as we pray a prayer of blessing and remember Christ’s presence at that moment.

The challenge I want to leave you with here today is to make every meal a celebration of the presence of Christ. At the very least have it be a remembrance of Christ’s presence with you, and at the most the sharing of that presence with others through thanksgiving and prayer.

We let people know that as we meet their physical needs for food, or backpacks for school, that it all has its source in God, the Living Bread that has come down from heaven.

This is who God is. This is who Jesus is. This is who you are. We bring God's presence into the world.

Let us prepare our hearts to celebrate that presence now in Holy Communion as we listen to our anthem and the Communion Elements are brought forward. Amen