

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 6: 24-35

***“Jesus - The Bread of Life”***

I don't know about you, but I am one of those guys that loves the smell of bread as it is baking. I could walk into a bakery and stay there for hours. I am sure some of you agree with me. We are all used to bread being just “a part” of our meal, almost a side dish. Some restaurants bring out the bread and butter even before the meal begins, and in some cases before you have even placed your order. Bread was really the chief food of Israel, made with barley flour mixed with broad beans, lentils, and other grains. It was not what we expect today as bread. The Hebrew word “lechem” means bread and has an Arabic equivalent meaning “meat.” If you remember from my sermon last week – the Hebrew word Bet, or Beth means “house of” – and we learned that Bethsaida means “house of fishing,” and Bethlehem or Bet-Lechem, where Jesus was born, means “house of bread.” How wonderful that the Creator of the Universe sees to it that the little town in which “the Bread of Life,” Jesus of Nazareth was born is named “the house of bread!” I believe that there is no such thing as a coincidence! The “bread of life” – Jesus Christ Himself, was born in the “house of bread.”

The “lechem” – the bread - was baked on a griddle, or in clay ovens, and made into flat loaves about 1/2 an inch thick. It is not “wonder bread” This was what it was like. They can be as large as 20 inches round. Usually a hole was left in the middle to make it easier to pull apart for eating. One important custom to know is the bread was NEVER cut – instead you break it. Those restaurants that bring out the hot bread would usually have a big knife with it. When you got the bread in Jesus' time – you would break it and take meat or fish which would be wrapped in the bread and eaten. It was without a doubt a very major part of every meal, not a side dish, but a dietary staple. The bread could be dipped into an oil or a humus type of compote.

Today's Gospel begins right after some very important events – it really seems like we are visiting “part three” of a three-part sermon series – about the compassion and love of Jesus – and how it is manifested through His signs or miracles. Here we find Jesus and the apostles in John chapter 6 -

- Right after the feeding of the five thousand men and their families, from 5 small barley loaves, and two fish.
- The disciples had gotten into the only boat on the shore and left.
- Jesus remained behind, praying on the mountain, until He saw the disciples struggling as they were rowing only three to three and a half miles in the middle of the night, so He walked several miles across the lake to join them. After He calmed the storm - instantly they got where they were going.
- A little later, some of the remaining people didn't see Jesus or the Disciples, as we heard in the beginning of our Gospel reading today, so they got into boats that came in from Tiberius and returned to Capernaum. When they got there, they asked Jesus - *“Rabbi, when did you get here?”*

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I want to suggest to you that I think a better question for them to ask could have been – Rabbi, HOW did you get here? Jesus was ready for them, and didn't answer their question, but instead He confronted them that the only reason they are looking for Him is to get some more of that bread that they filled up on, when He had fed the multitudes. The Galileans of Jesus' time had to work for their bread, so when they found a miraculous source of food -- this was Great News! I'll bet they thought they had it made – they had found the “gravy train.” They might have even been thinking that Jesus, (if He was the Messiah,) was going to provide them with a mother lode of Manna, just like Moses did – every day.

I am sure that those that were present at the feeding of the 5,000 men and their families remembered Jesus blessing the bread and looking to heaven, were reminded of the words of Psalm 78:23-25 *“Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the rain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.”* That took place for forty years. They were hoping this was their golden opportunity as well.

Jesus set the record straight – first of all, everybody was getting excited about the food, while many of them missed the miracle that took place – while others didn't realize the significance. They also missed the walking on the water. They missed the calming of the winds and the sea, and they missed the miracle of time and space *“as they got there immediately!”* You see when Jesus got into the boat – they were in Capernaum!

Jesus did not come to fill their stomachs, but He came to fill their lives, and their spirits --- with the very essence of God, Himself. The crowd was so hung up on the physical, instead of the spiritual aspect of what they were experiencing and witnessing. I got to thinking - how often can we be like that crowd, too busy focusing on stuff, rather than having the eyes and ears to hear God's presence in our lives?

Jesus again challenges the people, telling them not to work for food that perishes, but for food that endures forever – for eternal life – which only the Son of Man can give to you. Jesus tells us that this food can be obtained by work – and that work is one thing - by believing in him, but He reminds them that it is also a gift at the same time. What do you call a gift that you don't ask for or you don't deserve? It is called grace – and it is not something that we pray at a meal. Grace is a gift that is unrequested and undeserved. The Son of Man freely gives of His own life, and by doing so, makes it possible for us to share in that life.

Apparently, the Galileans were so caught up in the material stuff and filling their stomachs that they couldn't see Jesus' point, so they ask Him what God wants them to do. Jesus couldn't make it any more plain --- He said that they need to BELIEVE in Him – the one whom the Father has sent – that is the work that God requires. Could it be that easy? The answer to that question is YES, all we need to do is believe. I am reminded of the saying that really fits here, “Seeing is believing, but believing is seeing!” How often did Jesus say that we need ears to hear and eyes to see? Here we have an “eye witnesses” to miracle after miracle. We have John and

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Peter – (who told John Mark) but yet they didn't see it. They're still not getting it, so they ask Jesus for a sign, to help them believe. (We know that the disciples themselves didn't really "get it" until the Day of Pentecost – when they would be enlightened by the Holy Spirit – who would open their minds.)

- I cannot help but wonder what part of feeding over 5,000 people (men and their families) with 5 loaves and 2 fish didn't they get?
- And then the Apostles leave in the only boat, Jesus stays behind – more boats come – Jesus isn't around, they leave – they arrive in Capernaum – Jesus is already there. *Signs?* And they are looking for signs?

From the original Greek, the word used is σημειον (semayon) means sign or miracle, and to John, the author of today's Gospel, signs and miracles are the same thing – they are interchangeable. It is pretty evident that these people have very, very short memories!

Let me ask you this: how often do we forget what God has done for us, taking His good gifts for granted, because they come to us sometimes in rather ordinary ways, with no flashes and spectacular or special effects? How often do we forget to take stock in the blessings that He has given to us? The Galileans are not alone in having short memories. I have been teaching over and over and over again about the three-word prayer – "help me Jesus" and the other three-word prayer "thank you Jesus." I know that a lot of you, because you have told me, have been making use of those prayers, and especially saying "thank you Jesus" a lot more than you have been.

One thing they haven't forgotten about is the food. Next, they bring up the Manna in the desert issue – quoting to Jesus that their ancestors had bread from heaven to eat. They were asking Jesus to do something even greater than Moses did, to prove that He was greater than Moses. After all, not only had Moses brought their ancestors the Manna, but he also freed them from the horrible rule of the Egyptians. Now they saw someone who could fill their stomachs and who could also possibly be the Messiah: and maybe, just maybe He would free them of the oppressive rule of the Romans.

Jesus reminds them what the truth really is; totally rejecting any thought whatsoever about drawing a comparison between Himself and Moses, or the manna and the true bread – which gives life to the world.

- First of all – Jesus says It wasn't Moses who sent the manna, but God the Father.
- The manna of the desert that the Israelites fed upon had to be collected every morning, before the sun melted it. If stockpiled for any other day than the Sabbath, it bred worms and spoiled.
- Manna was food for the body and was a gift of God's provision for those 40 years that they walked in circles in the wilderness. Jesus Himself is God's full provision for people in their whole existence. Jesus repeatedly tells us that He had come down from heaven.

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If we believe in Jesus, as the Son of the Living God, we are drawn out of the wilderness of darkness and sin and fed with the food of eternal life.

Just like the Samaritan Woman at the well in John 4, “*asking for more*” when Jesus offered her the living water of eternal life, this crowd says, “*give us this bread - always.*”

In answer to this request, Jesus drives His point home by saying: “*I am the bread of life.*” He is ideally saying “you are looking at Him – I AM the bread of life.” If you recall last week in Mark 6, Jesus calmed the apostles by telling them, “*It is I*” and how that really relates to “*I AM is here.*” The text in the original New Testament Greek, and the translation of “*ego eimi*” “*εγω ειμι*” for “*I AM*” jumped out at me. The same words, “*ego eimi*” “*εγω ειμι*” in the Ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament – the same words were used by God in Exodus 3:14, proclaiming his holy name to Moses -- “*I am*” “*ego eimi*” “*εγω ειμι.*” If you put these things together – Jesus is revealing His true identity – “*I AM.*”

This is the first of seven times that Jesus used these very same words describing His true identity as God Himself – in the Gospel of John. He has told us, “*I am the Good Shepherd,*” “*I am the true Vine,*” “*I am the gate,*” “*I am the way, the truth and the life,*” as He told the sister of Lazarus “*I am the resurrection and the life,*” “*I am the light of the world*” – and by proclaiming “*I am the bread of life, Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*” Jesus reveals to us that He alone is the key to our spiritual birth and our spiritual survival.

Believing in Jesus, reading His Holy Word, having a personal relationship with Him, and as we are about to do in just a few moments, exercising the privilege of receiving His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, then we are partakers of that heavenly bread – “*the Bread of Life*”. Just as bread must be eaten to sustain physical life, we need to invite Jesus Christ into our lives to give us spiritual life and to sustain it. We need to receive spiritual life when we come to Jesus Christ. We need to invite Him in. Revelation 3:20 – the image of Jesus standing in a garden at a door and the door has no handle or door knob and Jesus says “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock, whoever opens I will come in and dine with him and he with Me.*” Jesus is the “perfect gentleman” who will never force Himself on us or make us to love Him. That is not who Jesus is. He has the power to knock the door down – or walk through it – like He did on the Day of Resurrection to meet with the Apostles in the Upper Room. But that is not who Jesus is. That decision belongs to each one of us. Do you want to share eternal life with Jesus, or not? That is a good question. Please think about your relationship with Jesus and pray about your decision. Last week I gave you an image, which is very personal to me, of Jesus far off in a distance – you love Him, you adore Him, and I asked you a question: do you know OF Jesus or do you truly know Him? Knowing of Him – you can admit that He is God, that He is the Lord I speak from personal experience – of a time in my life. I grew up a Roman Catholic and I knew Of Jesus, I loved Him, I adored Him, I prayed to Him, and I sang to Him – but He was always at a distance, until one day when I asked Him into my heart – at a Cursillo conference. I must

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have gone through a box pf Kleenex – all I did was weep. Why? Because that day He came from that distance to right here. I felt Him say to me “what took so long?” Only I can answer that question. Only you can answer that question.

The long and short of it is that - it is me, and it is you, who needs to ask Jesus in – and when we do, I can promise you - that your lives with be never the same.