

REMEMBER THE BREAD

John 6:35, 41-51 [MW18-24]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 12 August 2018

Another of my favourite authors is Max Lucado

- on the subject of "Bread" he writes:

My wife Denalyn called as I was driving home the other day. "Can you stop at the grocery store and pick up some bread?"

"Of course."

"Do I need to tell you where to find it?"

"Are you kidding? I was born with a bread-aisle tracking system."

"Just stay focused, Max."

She was nervous. Rightly so. I am the Exxon Valdez of grocery shopping. My mom once sent me to buy butter and milk; I bought buttermilk. I mistook a tube of hair cream for toothpaste. I thought the express aisle was a place to express your opinion. I am a charter member of the Clueless Husband Shopping Squad. I can relate to the fellow who came home from the grocery store with one carton of eggs, two bags of flour, three boxes of cake mix, four bags of sugar and five cans of cake frosting. His wife looked at the bags of groceries and lamented, "I never should have numbered the list."

So knowing that Denalyn was counting on me, I parked the car at the market and entered the door. En route to the bread aisle, I spotted my favorite cereal, so I picked up a box, which made me wonder if we needed milk. I found a gallon in the dairy section. The cold milk stirred images of one of God's great gifts to humanity: Oreo cookies. The heavenly banquet will consist of tables and tables of Oreo cookies and milk. We will spend eternity dipping and slurping our way through ... OK, enough of that.

I grabbed a pack of cookies, which happened to occupy the same half of the store as barbecue potato chips. What a wonderful world this is - cookies and barbecue chips under the same roof! On the way to the checkout counter, I spotted some ice cream. Within a few minutes I'd filled the basket with every essential item for a happy and fulfilled life. I checked out and drove home.

Denalyn looked at my purchases, then at me. Can you guess her question? All together now: "Where's the bread?"

I went back to the grocery store. I forgot the big item. The one thing I went to get. The one essential product. I forgot the bread.

Might we make the same mistake in a more critical arena? In an effort to do good, we can get distracted. We feed people. We encourage, heal, help and serve. We address racial issues and poverty. Yet there is one duty we must fulfill. We can't forget the bread.

In today's gospel Jesus says he is the "bread of life"

- so far in John's gospel Jesus has been "The Word" and "Spirit"

now perhaps in calling himself 'bread' he is coming down to earth
entering our world, becoming 'real', grounded

"The Word" and "Spirit" take up a lot of John's gospel

- and are not concepts easily grasped and understood and applied

on the other hand, most of us know at least something about 'hunger'
that gnawing feeling in the pit of your stomach when you go without food

- we probably also have some acquaintance

with that gnawing pain in the heart of the soul

There are lots of people today who are hungry

- but not just for the kind of bread you get from a baker
- Jesus seems to be talking about that kind of hunger here

When we are hungry

- it's a reminder that we are creatures, animals who need nourishment or we die
- but there is another kind of death among us: the death of the soul
- a wasting away, a losing of the lust for life
- when the eyes go dull and people don't know if they can go on
- that kind of death surrounds us
- not dramatic momentary death
- but death that comes day by day, drop by drop

People sometimes come to church because they are 'hungry'

- I've heard people say something along the lines of:
'we left that church because we were not really being fed'
- they didn't mean the church wasn't providing a decent morning tea
- or enough pot-luck dinners
- they meant their souls were being malnourished
- there wasn't enough substance in the preaching, or the prayers
- or the music or the worship
- to sustain them through the week and the daily demands of discipleship

Jesus promises that he is bread

- Jesus says he is the bread come down from heaven
- just like the Hebrews had manna in the wilderness
- to sustain them on the exodus from Egypt
- Jesus says he is like that bread
- come down from heaven to sustain us

I invite you to close your eyes and take a moment to reflect

- what image, what picture comes to mind
- when I say the word: "Jesus"?

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For some of you perhaps Jesus is the one hanging on the cross

- for others maybe he is the one who sits on high, in heaven
- or maybe he is praying alone in the garden
- or has the children gathered around him
- today I encourage you to think of Jesus the way he urges here
- as bread
- bread!

Jesus is that bread that satisfies when nothing else can

- you chew on him, bit by bit
taking your time to savour each morsel
- it is not dramatic
just life giving
- take time to enjoy him
let him become part of your life and thereby give you life

Sometimes people talk about the dramatic incursions of God amongst us

- striking, life-changing moments when it is as if God has invaded their world
swept over them, grasped them with intensity and shook them up
- today Jesus asks us to think of him as bread
as a meal
as that daily, life-giving presence that keeps us going

One answer people give when asked why they are at church Sunday after Sunday is

- I am here to get nourished to make it through the week
and like in our church, maybe on most Sundays
there's nothing too dramatic, too way out
- at our best it's the regular reading of the Bible, the praying of prayers
singing, preaching and listening to sermons, the celebration of communion
- and perhaps this is why in our church, in the Anglican tradition
the altar, the Lord's Table, is the visual centre
- for it is that which enables us to keep on keeping on as a disciple

The celebration of communion at the Lord's Table

- is a celebration of Jesus, the bread of life
it nourishes us
it is our bread, it is our life

(pause)

This coming week most of us will probably eat some kind of bread

- toast, sandwich, a bun, a specialty loaf, even pizza or a doughnut
and when you do I invite you to consider Jesus, the bread of life
- bread is so ordinary and so much around us we could take it for granted
I encourage you to be especially aware of "bread" this week
and to allow bread to remind you of Jesus, the source of life

Jesus has promised to satisfy your hunger and thirst

- indeed to satisfy all your needs
may we not take this, or our daily bread, for granted
- remember to thank Jesus for the life he gives to you
and as you take, eat and are nourished by bread this week
may you be encouraged to share the food for body and soul
that you have found in Jesus

Here's how Max Lucado concludes that piece I began with:

The grain-to-bread process is a demanding one. The seed must be planted before it can grow. When the grain is ripe, it must be cut down and ground into flour. Before it can become bread, it must pass through the oven. Bread is the end result of planting, harvesting and heating.

Jesus endured an identical process. He was born into this world. He was cut down, bruised and beaten on the threshing floor of Calvary. He passed through the fire of God's wrath, for our sake. He "suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all - was put to death and then made alive - to bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

Bread of Life? Jesus lived up to the title, but an unopened loaf does a person no good. Make sure you receive the bread. Once you do, pass it on. After all, if we don't, who will? Governments don't feed the soul. The secular relief house can give a bed, meal and valuable counsel; but believers can give much more - not just help for this life but hope for the next.

So along with the cups of water, plates of food and vials of medicine, let there be the message of sins forgiven and death defeated.

Remember the Bread.

Jesus said:

I am that bread from heaven! Everyone who eats it will live forever.

My flesh is the life-giving bread that I give to the people of this world.

Make sure you receive the bread

- remember the bread
- pass on the bread
- the bread of life