

I AM – The Bread of Life

John 6:35-40
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First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

At the main train station in Suceava, Romania, a team from World Central Kitchen met little Evelina, a Ukrainian refugee about 5 years old. Evelina's mother first heard the bombings at 6 a.m. She took both Evelina and her own mother into the basement of their apartment building, but there wasn't enough space for them. They found shelter at a local hospital, where they stayed in the basement for two days.

This Ukrainian family then fled for the Romanian border, a trip that took several more days. Evelina's mother said she tried to avoid listening to the radio or any news from the attacks. Once safe in Romania, Evelina had her first hot meal since the journey began –prepared by a World Central Kitchen partner named Bazzil. World Central Kitchen provides meals in response to humanitarian crises. Founder and Chef José Andrés says, "(It) started with a simple idea at home with my wife Patricia: when people are hungry, send in cooks. Not tomorrow, today."

When people are hungry, feed them. That's what we see in today's New Testament lesson where Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." Jesus is speaking to the crowds which followed him directly from the Feeding of the 5,000. Earlier in John, he says to 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" Jesus is talking to hungry people, no matter what they hunger for. When people are hungry, Jesus is there to feed them, body and soul. And yet, there are so many hungry unsatisfied and neglected people in the world. Why is that?

There are so many people who hunger for food and water, others who hunger for love and acceptance, some for a meaningful purpose in life, others for power and money, control and certainty. Still others, hunger for a world of peace and plenty. Some of this, Jesus readily gives us. He gives us love and acceptance, saying, "Anyone who comes to me, I will never drive away." Some of what people hunger for, Jesus longs to give us and everyone if we would only accept his teachings – food and water, for example. "Whoever comes to me," says Jesus, "will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Some of what we hunger for, Jesus warns us about – power and money, for example. As the Apostle Paul says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich, some have wandered away from the faith...." (1 Tim. 6:10) And as for control and certainty in life, peace and plenty the world over – how's that going for us?

Doesn't seem possible, does it? We long for certainty in life and a world of peace and plenty, and God desires it for us for all people, all nations. What would it take to live in a world of peace and plenty? Jesus shows us what it takes, what it takes for us as individuals, families and communities to have peace and plenty, and to have that blessing spread throughout the world. It's all about what we see, follow and trust. After assuring the crowds they need never suffer hunger or thirst again, Jesus says to them, "But I said to you, You have seen me and yet do not believe."

And sure enough, John tells us that right after this teaching about Jesus being the Bread of Life, - being all that we need to thrive -many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (6:33-35, 66) Even though they ate their fill at the Feeding of the 5,000, they refused to accept what they saw with their own eyes, that Jesus is able to provide for all needs.

What evidence have we seen about the power of Jesus that we refuse to accept, individually or as people across the globe? How about scripture? How much of our lives and the world we live in is contrary to the teachings and spirit of scripture? A lot. What about history, events of the past. How many times do we repeat our mistakes, individually and on a global scale? Too many.

What about miracles – Jesus did lots of miracles, and we see miracles today. But do we live into those miracles so that they live in us and through us, or do we forget or deny what we've seen about faith in Jesus and return to fear and disbelief when things don't go our way? What about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and all the hope, peace, joy and love it brings? Too often, we lose hope and turn our backs on faith, don't cultivate joy in our hearts and in our families, and reject the peace and love that Jesus brings.

Our daily bread – the food we eat – preserves our bodies. We eat and digest so that we might live. Jesus as our heavenly food preserves our souls. We strive to trust and obey so that all might live. Bread, the food we eat provides for our existence, but it is Jesus who gives us life. During the height of the pandemic when we were worshiping on Zoom, my wife Yuri got into baking bread from scratch. One Sunday I had a bit of fresh baked bread and a little morning tea set aside for Communion. After saying, "Let us partake in the body of Christ, I put the bread into my mouth, began to chew and said on mic over Zoom, "Umm, delicious." And it was. Jesus is delicious.

Jesus gives warmth and flavor and tenderness to life, while the bread we eat, the food we eat provides only for our existence. Don't live your days merely existing, not when you can have the warmth and flavor and tender blessings of a life lived in Christ. By taking Jesus into our very being, processing who he is for us and for this world, having him as the source and sustainer of our lives, we gain access to world peace and a life of abundance for all. Once we and all the world come to see that this is what Jesus offers, it becomes easy to share in it with others.

Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa said, “The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned for the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn’t say, ‘Now is that political or social?’ He said, ‘I feed you.’ Because the good news to a hungry person,” says Bishop Tutu, “is bread.”¹ Just like the good news to someone in wartime is peace. We have the power to end our warring ways. We have the power to end world hunger. We have the power to stop fighting and arguing about politics. We have the power to create families and communities of love and acceptance. And that power comes from Jesus.

And yet, John tells us, “Because of this (teaching), many ... turned back and no longer went ... with Jesus.” They didn’t see and follow and trust what he had to say, what he showed to them. Do we. Do we trust enough not to turn our backs on Jesus, not to turn our backs on each other? Do we trust enough to take Jesus into our very being as the Bread of Life, and share the blessings of life with others- food for those who go hungry, security for those who are vulnerable, love and acceptance for those who feel rejected, and peace for those in the grip of war. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Jesus, we are hungry for your Bread of Life and thirsty for your Living Waters. But sometimes our lack of faith is like a person with a cold who passes a bakery and cannot smell the goodness of fresh-baked bread. It is in proportion to our faith that our hearts and minds are opened to you, and we are fed and nourished.

May our faith grow, so that nourished by your bread and water, we may nourish others. Open our hearts to the goodness of trusting in you and following your way.

Send the goodness of yourself upon those who need you most, the refugees fleeing Russia’s attack on Ukraine, those reeling from the impact of this war both near and far, and those near to us who are struggling in other battles, battles with illness and disease, battles with financial insecurity, battles with temptation and misguided ways.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, whose Spirit is our sustainer in all of life, and who taught us to pray together, saying

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

¹ Desmond Tutu, cited by Harold T. Lewis in *A Church for the Future: South Africa as the Crucible for Anglicanism in a New Century* (Church Publishing, 2007), 65.