

Provisions for Your Journey

John 6:24-35
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First Presbyterian Church
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If you're like me, you like to snack. I'm a pretzel guy, figuring it's better than eating chips or peanuts or other fatty foods. Did you know that what you snack on says a lot about who you are?

Alan Hirsch, of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago, gave a personality test to 800 volunteers and then asked them to name their favorite snacks. The results were astounding.¹

People who share a personality type choose the same snack 95 percent of the time. For instance, lovers of cheese curls have a high sense of morals and ethics. People who snack on popcorn are the take-charge type. Folks whose snack food is peanuts, and the like are even-tempered, easy to get along with and highly empathetic.

While this might sound like a stretch, Hirsch says it makes perfect sense – biologically. “Food preferences reside in the olfactory lobe,” he says, “the same part of the brain where the personality resides.” In other words, you are what you munch.

In today's New Testament lesson, Jesus has just performed the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish to feed a multitude of people, with 12 baskets of bread left over.

After Jesus and the disciples go on their way, the crowd follows them to Capernaum, craving more of what they received from Jesus. Seeing them, Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 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.”

They were looking for Jesus because he gave them bread and fish. These are people who are used to being hungry, living one day at a time. If they don't work that day, they don't eat.

That's why everyone was caught short after spending the whole day away listening to Jesus. In their zeal to see Jesus, they didn't bring any snacks or provisions for a picnic in the wilderness. And this left them truly hungry.

Have you ever been truly hungry and yet had no food? It's not a very comfortable position to be in. You're stomach suddenly feels empty. You start to feel a little lightheaded. Weakness begins to set in, and there's nothing you can do about it, no food at hand. Finally, you reach a place to get a bite to eat, maybe the fridge at home, or a store or restaurant to dash into.

¹ Reported in the journal *Alternative Medicine* (May 2007)

What is it to be given food when you're really hungry and at risk of going without? It's lifesaving, isn't it?

That's why the crowd follows Jesus. They were really hungry and at risk of going without when Jesus performed a miracle and satisfied their greatest need, in the moment. So they're drawn to follow Jesus, and all they can think of is that wonderful, lifesaving bread he gave them. But Jesus knows what they truly need is so much more.

What do you think of in your desire to follow Jesus? I mean, Jesus promises us "food that endures for eternal life." What is that for you, what does Jesus do for you, personally?

For some, it's unconditional love and acceptance. In John 6:37, Jesus says, "... Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away." For others, it's a sense of purpose. "Come, follow me," says Jesus, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19)

Still others seek guidance, which Jesus promises when he says, "... The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

Or how about rest and renewal for "those who are weary and carrying heavy burdens" (Matt. 11:28). And then, of course, there's our heavenly reward for those who follow Christ, which Jesus promises, saying, "... If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:3)

These are the gifts, the provisions that Jesus promises us as we journey through life – love and acceptance, a sense of purpose and calling, guidance along the way, rest and renewal when needed, and the assurance of life everlasting in Christ.

These are the promises, the provisions we truly need. But are these what you really crave in life, what you seek from your relationship with Jesus. Or do you expect that which is not promised, and then get disappointed when it doesn't come?

Some of us want all the answers, and of course that flies in the face of the mysteries of our faith. Some want constant comfort, when in fact, Jesus said we would suffer, particularly for his sake, as we put others ahead of ourselves, as Jesus did, as the Risen Lord does.

Still others demand what they want when they want it, and if they don't get it, they're not happy. But Jesus didn't promise us eternal happiness, but rather an inner sense of peace and acceptance and even joy, especially when we suffer or go without while trusting in God and having faith in Christ.

It's no fun to not get what you want or what you think you need. But it is faithful and even blessed, as we come to learn that God provides what we truly need and protects us on our true path forward.

Take for instance, the guest at a luxury hotel restaurant who called the headwaiter over one morning and placed his order. "I'd like one egg undercooked so it's runny," he said, "and one egg overcooked so it's tough and hard to eat. And I'd also like grilled bacon that's a bit on the cold side, burnt toast, butter straight from the freezer so it's impossible to spread, and a pot of very weak, lukewarm coffee."

"That's a complicated order," said the waiter. "It might be quite difficult." "It can't be that difficult," said the guest. "It's exactly what you brought me yesterday!"

It's not easy distinguishing between what we want and what we truly need, what God wants for us, particularly when the world serves up so much that is really quite disappointing. But that is the secret to a blessed and content life.

The crowd around Jesus after the Feeding miracle didn't know what they truly needed, or how to get it. "What must we do to perform the works of God" – to live a blessed life? they ask.

And Jesus answers them saying, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." And, like us, they do want to believe, they want to be truly satisfied with the bread of life that Jesus offers.

"Sir," they say, "give us this bread always." And Jesus says to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

That's our calling in life, our purposes as children of God – to come to Jesus when we hunger deep down in our souls, and to believe in Jesus when we thirst for justice and peace and love.

Jesus is the only provision you need for your life's journey. And this is the place to get it – gathered around the table of the Lord, where each month we receive the bread of life and share in the cup of the new covenant, where each week we are nourished by feeding on the Word of God, where every day we are embraced, equipped and sent as disciples of the Lord, and where every moment we are reminded and assured that God has and will provide all we truly need, now and for always. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, how amazing is your love for us that you would send your only Son to save us? That you would make your Word flesh so that you could be among us?

We can only begin to understand the magnitude of your love through all of the ways we encounter Jesus in our lives.

We are grateful for Jesus as our shepherd – the one who cares for us and knows us by name. We no longer have to be people who walk in darkness, because we have Jesus as the light to guide our way. We hunger no more for we are nourished by Jesus who is the Bread of Life.

We find solace in Jesus who comforts us in times of fear and struggle, illness and disease.

We ask your comfort, Lord, especially for those we lift up in prayer. And for us, Lord, we are thankful we are not stuck in fear and hopelessness, because we know that Jesus has already conquered sin and death and all earthly struggles.

We live in confidence knowing that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, Jesus 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.