

August 2, 2009 Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

### **Unbelievable Hunger. Unbelievable Bread.**

A nine-year-old named Danny came bursting out of Sunday school like a wild stallion. His eyes were darting in every direction as he tried to locate either mom or dad. Finally, after a quick search, he grabbed his Daddy by the leg and yelled, “Man, that story of Moses and all those people crossing the Red Sea was great!” His father looked down, smiled, and asked the boy to tell him about it.

“Well, the Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. So the Jews ran as fast as they could until they got to the Red Sea. The Egyptian Army was gettin’ closer and closer. So Moses got on his walkie-talkie and told the Israeli Air Force to bomb the Egyptians. While that was happening, the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross over. They made it!”

By now old dad was shocked. “Is THAT the way they taught you the story?”

“Well, no, not exactly,” Danny admitted, “But if I told you the way they told it to us, you’d never believe it, Dad.”<sup>i</sup>

The little boy got it exactly right. There are some things that we find simply unbelievable! It’s easier to make something up than to expect someone to really believe these crazy Bible stories!

Our gospel reading today finds us at the point where the people had just witnessed another unbelievable event -- the miracle of Jesus feeding over 5000 hungry people – they got their fill and there was even food left over. No way! How could that happen? It happened, and here we find that the crowd is still following Jesus, but somehow lost sight of where he went. It’s like they’d been sitting on their couches after a big dinner to relax and digest their food (zoning out) and suddenly realized that they needed to find him, but couldn’t remember why. When they find him, they seem to ask a completely irrelevant question: “Rabbi, when did you come here?” I’m not really sure there’s any point to that question. (Maybe there really are stupid questions). After what they had seen, what they experienced, THAT’S the question that they ask Jesus? Why didn’t someone ask him, “Hey Jesus, how did you do that?” “Hey, Jesus, what just happened here?” “Hey, Jesus, tell me more about this bread of life business.”

The crowd doesn’t get it. They are focused on their full bellies and are missing the bigger picture of who Jesus is and what kind of bread he can provide. Isn’t that the case? We are either focused on how hungry we are (or think we are) and as soon as we are satisfied, we are looking for something more/something else? Even after he goes through a bit of an

explanation, they ask what “works” they are to perform – “What must WE do to perform the works of God?” And their final comment SEEMS to say that they understand, “Sir, give us this bread always,”, but they still seem to lack in understanding what kind of bread Jesus means. They still seem to miss the point that it is not about what they do, but it is about the work that God does for them – God provides Jesus, the bread of life, for them. It’s not surprising that they don’t get it. I mean, we are pretty slow sometimes and what Jesus is saying IS a bit hard to believe. Jesus is making a pretty big claim and I can imagine asking him several times, “Now, Jesus, come again? You’re what?” There are many people today that still have a hard time with what Jesus is offering. How can it be? WHAT are you giving me at Communion? This is the body of Christ/this is the blood of Christ given for you? Come again?

Hunger is something that we can understand. Have you ever been so hungry that you can’t think of anything else? Or maybe the better question for most of us is have you ever eaten so much you can’t think of anything else other than your full stomach?

We like food. We, as a congregation, like to fellowship around food. There’s something so natural and comforting about sharing a meal with someone. It’s what we do. It’s how we care for one another. Yet, sometimes we try to feed our hunger for acceptance, our hunger for security by feeding what we think is a physical hunger for food. We fill our stomachs with things that taste good, yet leave us empty for what we truly need.

And we can’t deny the fact that not everyone has their “daily bread” provided for them. Many people wonder when their next meal is going to be. Those of you who have served at The Cornerstone Mission KNOW how much those being served need that food – for many, their very lives depend upon it. Those who work at the mission hope that those who volunteer show up so that a meal can be served. Those who receive that meal are filled with thankfulness to the servers. And yet, as someone who provides the food and helps serve, it’s wonderful and hard to hear that word of thanks b/c I can’t help but think that I could do more to provide something as simple, as essential as daily bread.

What does it mean to someone who has deep, physical hunger to hear Jesus saying, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”? Is it hard to imagine or does it come across as the good news that it is? Or does it produce more questions: How can Jesus make the promise that I will never hunger or thirst again when my stomach aches for food? My guess is that Jesus’ promise is understood greatly b/c it speaks of a future hope, a future fulfillment that brings a person beyond their current state of hunger to a current state of hope and knowledge that God knows them and loves them enough to give them an eternal promise.

While we continue God's work of feeding those who are physically hungry, it is also a time to speak the good news of Jesus and share the promise that will fill up our souls.

I think that's where this gospel story simply becomes unbelievable – Jesus, claiming to be the bread of life. Jesus promises to give himself to us so that we will never thirst or hunger again.

And yet, I come to you today saying that we cannot only talk about this amazing claim, we can also celebrate this simply unbelievable promise when you come forward to the table to receive the gift of Christ himself, handed over to you. Through it you are fed by Jesus, given faith itself that is not built on something that you have to do, but upon God's love, GOD'S work in and through you. That's why Faith can be such a surprise! That's why, when we finally come to realize how much God loves us, how much Jesus has done for us, we know that our souls are filled with Jesus, the bread of life.

Feed us Lord, for we hunger for you (even when some of us do not realize what that hunger is truly for). Fill us Lord, with your hope (even when there are times that our current state only finds us hope-less). Help us to share the good news with those who hunger in mind, body and spirit. May they be filled by you. You are the Bread of Life. Unbelievable!

#### Some Helpful Sources:

1. Prof. Brian Peterson on WorkingPreacher.Org
2. RevGalBlog
3. Bear Butte area pastors' text study

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<sup>i</sup> I can't remember the source for this story.