

The Bread that Sticks

John 6:22-35

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered 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. 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. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said 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.

Let’s set up the story. Twelve hours ago, a little boy gave Jesus a few loaves and a couple fish. Twelve hours ago, Jesus multiplied the earthy flatbread and pink salmon with baskets overflowing until all were fed. Twelve hours ago, the crowd, with their full bellies, wanted to make Jesus king. And twelve hours ago, Jesus fled the scene in a hurry to avoid them. The next morning the people Jesus fed have come back with stomachs growling for more. The boats are floating in with oars smacking against the calm water. The boats are circling around where Jesus had fed them the night before, like ducks circling around a pier hoping for some bread crumbs. The problem that comes with feeding 5,000 people is you have to keep feeding 5,000 people. Eventually, they find Jesus on the other side of the lake who turns to them and says, “Stop chasing after bread that perishes. Instead, work for the bread that endures for eternity.” “Where do we get this bread?” they ask. “I am the Bread of Life,” says Jesus, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again.”

It is an odd thing to say to a group of hungry people, isn’t it? “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again.” I can think of about seven billion examples of people on this earth who will

be hungry again. Eighty or so are in this room. We are all hungry for something and we will be again. Early on, as babies, we awoke our parents several times in the wee hours of the night, screaming our precious little heads off. Why? Because we were hungry again. As children growing into teenager's mom and dad's monthly grocery bill soared. Why? Because we were hungry again. In about an hour from now most of us will be getting the urge to have our mid-day meal because we will be hungry again.

Our hunger isn't purely physical either. It can be emotional or spiritual too. Those who have watched a loved one's health decline, are starving for more good days than hard ones. Those who are feeling spiritually empty, hunger for a taste of God's presence. What do we imagine an African-American mother is hungry for these days? What about the parent who has been separated from their children at the border for the last 107 days—that's 321 meals and counting. What about the couple who walks into a bakery only to find that the baker refuses to bake them a same-gender wedding cake; what are they hungry for? The question isn't if we will be hungry again. The question is what are we hungry for? Physically. Emotionally. Spiritually. So it is a rather odd thing for Jesus to say: "Whoever comes to me will *never* be hungry again."

It makes me wonder: what is the special ingredient in the bread Jesus promises? What is the Spirit-infused additive that is baked into the dough? We know the basic bread recipe: flour, water, salt, yeast. But what is in the Bread of Life that is different? In scripture we find a clue: the Greek word Jesus uses to describe the bread he offers is the word *menō*. It is translated "endures" here, but it is also translated in other places as "to remain" or "abide." We might even translate it "to stick." Whatever the ingredient is in the bread Jesus offers, it sticks. So I began to investigate what this sticky ingredient could be.

On the eighteen-hour drive home from Maine we stopped overnight in Scranton, PA. Across from the hotel I could smell the greasy goodness of a Krispy Kreme Donuts—yes, there exists a Krispy Kreme in Scranton, PA. Then I thought about the ingredients: Flour, water, salt, yeast...and *sugar!* Sugar is sticky, isn't it? We lick the syrupy glaze off our fingertips. But the truth is, as sticky as a donut is, it lasts for only about ten minutes before I'm hungry again—it is probably why they sell them by the dozen!

We need to investigate further.

Then I started thinking maybe it wasn't an ingredient in the bread, but *who was making the bread that made this bread last*. During the science experiment at VBS this week, the children gathered around the table with Miss Cindy and made slime. We watched them mix, mold, twist, turn the Goo over and over again. It got webbed between their little fingers, stuck under their fingernails, and pasted onto their clothes. It was a holy sticky mess. The moment reminded me of what my hands and clothes look like after mixing, molding, twisting, turning dough. Then I read a story about a church that had their children make the communion bread every once in a while and how the experience stuck with them. Maybe it was *who made the bread that made the bread special (currently Margaret)*. Except while we certainly cherish the grace-filled hands that go into making our bread, I'm not completely sold that this it is what Jesus is talking about here.

We need to investigate further.

But then we experienced something in church last Sunday: Susan invited us to sit in the Fellowship Hall as part of the service to celebrate communion and enjoy a meal together. There was a vivacious, mouth-watering spread: pita and raisin breads, whole grain wheat and gluten-free breads. Humus and pistachios, figs and dates. Grapes and goat cheese. An abundant feast from an abundant God. I saw you smiling and laughing, sharing stories and being thankful for the opportunity to share life. It reminded me of another thing Jesus says in this text: “The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” It’s this bread of God that nurtures and sustains life around that table. It is this bread of God which gives life around our own kitchen tables. The bread that gave the disciples life around their table on the night Jesus was betrayed and on the beach the morning Jesus was resurrected.

Then it hit me. Not only is it flour, water, salt and yeast—the gifts from the earth. Not only is it the grace-filled hands that mix, mold, twist and turn the dough that makes this bread stick. The mysterious ingredient is the love of God shared among *us*. We are the Body of Christ, fed by the enduring, eternal love of Christ around our tables. And then in turn we offer this bread to the tables in the hard places, the hurting places, the hungry places. “The bread of God is that which comes down and gives life to the world.”

Today we confirm Elena Zuidema as an adult member. She has decided to join this Body of Christ because something has stuck with her. Maybe it is the ingredients of your love and acceptance. Maybe it is the additives of inclusivity and openness. Whatever it is, you have helped form her understanding of what the church is about; what God is about. Friends, that is no small thing. And if I may say: our hope for you Elena—as well as for all of us—is that no matter what life puts before your feet or places on your shoulders, you know that God is there sticking with you...and so are we.

“The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,” says Jesus. From him to me, to you, to the friend, to the stranger, to the young, to the old, to the poor, to the wealthy, to the citizen, to the immigrant, to the ally, to the enemy, to those who are famished and to those who are full. Offering the bread that sticks, so our world will never go hungry again.