

11th Sunday after Pentecost B 04 August 2024

John 6:24-35

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth

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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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 pray: ...

Who goes grocery shopping and picks out mould encrusted fruit, stale bread, curdled milk, and rotten meat? Why would you waste your hard-earned cash on food that will make you sick (unless you particularly love the emergency department at the Lyell Mac)? Jesus said, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life." WOW! Who doesn't want that? Imagine a fully stocked pantry, fridge and deep freezer that can never be depleted. No wonder the people said to Jesus. "Gimme, gimme, gimme." Jesus replies, "I AM what you seek!" Clearly, we're not talking about ordinary food here. Jesus says, "I AM the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

But isn't hunger and thirst the very stuff of life? Isn't hunger, thirst, desire, longing, yearning, the very thing that drives us all? Don't we all hunger for a better, fuller, more satisfying life? Don't we all want to feed some internal emptiness? Aren't we all looking for something?

What is it that you're hungry for, but can never seem to satisfy? And I'm not just talking about wealth or material things. Many of us have deep, spiritual yearnings. Those who have a relationship with Jesus and worship God, generally have a handle on their material longings and give for the sake of the well-being of others. But we long for other things like:

- a more spiritual life. We yearn to know God. We want to experience communion with God.
- a deeper understanding of the cosmos.
- answers to our deep questions.
- assurances that when all's said and done, everything will be hunky-dory and we'll dwell for eternity with all our loved ones and never be sad again.
- deeper understanding and courage to serve our neighbours.
- being around people who appear to be on the same journey as we ourselves are on.

We're all here trying to satisfy some hunger or other and to all of us Jesus says, "I AM the bread of life." Yet, at hard as I try dear Jesus, I'm still hungry. I know you're the bread of life, and I know that "Whoever comes to you will never be hungry and whoever believes in you will never be thirsty." And yet, I still find myself wanting, needing, longing for something more. So, I continue to study your Word, and I hunt and I search and I pray, and I try to listen. But I'm still not satisfied. I'm still hungry and thirsty, Jesus.

I know that's why I became a pastor in the first place. There's no question that I wanted to serve God and his people, and evangelise the gospel, but my primary motivation was, and still is I suppose, my own hunger and desire to know God more personally. For me, bread from heaven takes the form of intimacy with God. I know that I have an insatiable appetite and desire to know God, to see God, to be with God.

Each of us is here today for all sorts of reasons, but I believe that deep down inside each of us there's a hunger that drives us; a hunger to know the One who made us, the One who lies at the very heart of this thing we call reality; the One who is so much more that we can begin to imagine. The One we hope is there. The One we long for with a kind of hunger that drives us to places we never dreamed we'd go, searching for the knowledge of the ONE who IS – the great I AM!

Jesus said, I AM the bread of life. Jesus also said, I AM the way the truth and the life. The people who heard Jesus two millennia ago, were Jewish and they would have understood Jesus when he said, I AM. I AM is the very name of God. Ἐγώ εἰμι – “I am”, is the very echo of what God said when Moses asked him his name and God said, אֶהְיֶה אֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה - “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). The very name of God is the verb to be: I AM, or, I EXIST.

Friends, the bread of life is the ordinary stuff of life that we fail to notice, enjoy, or appreciate. The bread of life is the great I AM and knowledge of the great I AM begins with knowledge of the self. Jesus says “I AM the way”, and somehow we keep missing that very simple teaching. Down through the ages we’ve heard glimpses of it. In Ancient Greece, when Socrates was asked to sum up what all philosophical commandments could be reduced to, he said, “Know yourself.” Shakespeare instructed us in the words of Polonius from *Hamlet*, “To thine own self be true.”

We fill our lives with distractions in the vain hope that the distractions can satisfy our hunger. When only the I AM who dwells within each of us can ever satisfy our hunger. But where can we find this bread? Lord, give us this bread to eat!

One thing that my father taught me as a small child, and which I love to this very day, was that if I covered my ear with a large seashell, I’d be able to hear the ocean. It was only much later in life that I realised that the sound I was enjoying so very much was actually the joy that came from within me.

Jesus says, “I AM the way.” Jesus, God incarnate/God in flesh says, “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And yet, we try to fill our emptiness with all sorts of distractions from outside of our very selves. Distracted from ourselves we can’t love ourselves, and if we can’t love ourselves, we can’t love one another and if we can’t love one another our love for God fails and we’re left hungry and thirsty. The distractions of this world lull us into a kind of dullness and we can go through life never really tasting the true richness of life. Or, we can know ourselves to be created in the very image of God, the great I AM, and in that image we can begin to learn about God and feast on the bread of life.

What I'm trying to say is, we can't learn more about God if we don't know ourselves. Knowledge of the great I AM begins with knowledge of the self. Some might think this is introspective and selfish. But as you learn about yourself, you'll discover what it means to be created in the image of God. You'll discover your own need to connect; your own longing and desire to connect with the great I AM who is love, and there you'll discover that your longing is surpassed by the longing of God for all that he has created, and there you'll discover love. You'll discover that you are created in the image of the great I AM who is love - and you will begin to love as he has first loved you.

You see, being the good Lutherans you are, you've learnt well to put Jesus at the centre of everything; to uphold justification for salvation by faith, grace, scripture, and Christ alone. You've been taught that it's not about you; it's all about God. And this is a good and necessary perspective to maintain. It's healthy for us to always look outward and upward, lest we boast proudly about our achievements, rather than Christ's work on the cross. But you simply don't like drawing attention to yourselves, do you!?!

And yet, yes, the inevitable, paradoxical, "But" of Christian theology: To whom does God devote his love, grace, peace, mercy, kindness, gentleness, provision, protection, and attention day by day? For whom, did God send his only Son into the world? For whom, did Christ suffer and die? That's right. YOU!

Jesus said, "I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. I AM the bread of life." May you, beautifully and wonderfully created in the image of the great I AM, begin to discover what lies within, and like Jesus, you'll be on the way to loving God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and loving your neighbour as you love yourself. The bread of life is yours! Take and eat. For you are sons and daughters of the great I AM, created and loved, nourished and fed, with blessings overflowing. You need never be hungry or thirsty! You have everything you need to love God and to love your neighbours as you love yourselves. So, eat, Saints, to your heart's delight, for the sake of the One who feeds and loves us all. Amen!

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.