

The Bread of Life
John 6:35-40
August 1, 2021

Have you noticed we use metaphors all the time in our conversations? Some metaphors are so common that they are almost a cliché: “You are the apple of my eyes”; “He is a rising star”; “America is a melting pot”; “Hard work is the key to success”, so on and so forth. The similes are common in everyday language.

Jesus also used many metaphors. He even used metaphors on himself. He compared himself to the light of the world, the good shepherd, the true vine, the door and the bread of life. As he compared himself to the Bread of Life, he said, “I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”¹

What is “the Bread of Life”? Why did he use this metaphor?

When you have your dinner, you usually have a soup or salad, an entrée and bread. Bread is not the main course. It is sort of an extra thing. It is there to fill you up. You don’t have to eat the bread if you don’t want to.

However, the Middle East, bread is not something extra. It is the heart of every meal. It is the very tool to use to get to the main course. They use thin pieces of pita bread at every meal. They break off a piece of the bread and use it to grab meat or vegetables and eat it together. They don’t use forks or chop sticks. They use bread. The only way you can get to the main dish is with the bread.

This is why Jesus used this expression, “I am the bread of life.” In other words, Jesus was saying that the only way you can come to life, the meaning of life, and realizing the purpose of life is through him.² Let’s consider this metaphor, the bread of life, and meditate on the unique message it conveys.

First of all, the bread of life is universal. No one is excluded. Jesus said, “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” He said “anyone”, meaning, everybody. Everyone is invited. There is no restriction on the ethnicity or race. It makes no difference who you are or how you have lived. Jesus Christ, “the Bread of Life,” is the universal Christ.

¹ John 6:35.

² William H. Hinson, THE POWER OF HOLY HABITS, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

Second, the bread of life is personal and communal. We experience the presence of God personally and also communally.

The late pastor Lloyd Ogilvie (1930-2019) once shared his personal experience of Christ's presence and comfort. There was a time when he had a serious accident that took him about a year to recover from. When he was in bed wondering when and how well he could walk again, a letter came from a friend. That letter contained a picture of the large lighted marquee sign of the church where Ogilvie was serving. The friend found that picture when she was going through her mother's things after she died.

The mother took that picture several years ago on the Sunday when Ogilvie had preached on the topic, "The Lord Never Forgets." The custodian who had arranged the letters on the sign that week had put Ogilvie's name right below this sermon title. There were no quotation marks, so it read: "The Lord Never Forgets Lloyd Ogilvie". Ogilvie said that was the most comforting and assuring thing at the moment when he wasn't sure about the future.³ It is true that the Lord never forgets any of us. The Lord, the Bread of Life, is very personal.

We also experience the Christ's presence communally.

Ben Weir, the Presbyterian missionary was a hostage in Lebanon for many years. Every Saturday night, he saved a piece of bread from dinner, and on Sunday morning as he had his own worship service he ate that piece of bread as a way of partaking in the Holy Communion with the Christians all over the world. He said it was the most moving and assuring experience. He did that every Sunday. Even in prison, he found a way to celebrate being in the presence of the Lord.⁴ The bread of Christ is universal yet personal. It is personal yet communal.

Third, the bread of life is time-sensitive and eternal.

When we go to the store, we notice that many items we purchase have an expiration date. Christ's bread is time-sensitive as well. Like manna, it needs to be consumed each and every day.

When Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer, he told his disciples to say "Give us this day our daily bread." Before we had preservatives, bread needed to be baked

³ Lloyd Ogilvie, *A FUTURE AND A HOPE*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988).

⁴ Bruce Larson, *THE PRESENCE* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), p. 98.

daily. Even if you wrapped it in a cloth, it could dry up hard by the next day in an arid climate, or it could grow moldy in a humid environment.

When Jesus taught the disciples to ask for the “Daily Bread”, perhaps he was telling all his disciples to depend on him, “the Bread of Life”, and commune with him each and every day. Like the Israelites gathered manna each and every day, we also need to commune with the Lord and depend on him each and every day.

The Bread of Life, the presence of the Lord is also eternal. Jesus said to the disciples, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁵ The Lord never abandons us, and never forgets us. He will be with us until the end of the age.

Fourth, the bread of life is to be kept, and it is to be given away.

The Lord, “the Bread of Life” gives us strength and comfort. We do not want to lose it, or misplace it. At the same time Christ wants us to give it away, to share his presence with others.

There was a young man in Florida, who had many years of a wayward and errant life but through his wife’s and other’s encouragement he accepted Jesus as his savior. When he accepted Jesus, his wife invited him to come to church with her. She told him that after the pastor gives the sermon, he might invite people to come and share a testimony. “If he does,” she said, “you might want to go forward and tell the congregation that you had accepted Jesus as your savior.” He had never been to a church in his life. Everything was strange and unfamiliar but he stayed through the service.

On that day, they had a Holy Communion. After the pastor finished his sermon, he approached the communion table and gave a brief explanation about the communion. Then he asked the servers come forward.

When this young man saw some people were going forward, he thought it was the time for him to go forward to give his testimony. The pastor realized he had never seen him but he just thought he just did not recognize him. When the servers were given the elements they all went to their proper place.

⁵ Matthew 28:20b.

This young man was also given the elements. He had received two trays, one for the bread and one for the little communion cups but he did not know what to do with them. So, he just followed another person and stood beside him.

A few minutes later, he came back to the pastor and asked, “Which of these do I eat first?” The pastor realized this young man was totally unfamiliar with their tradition. Then the young man said, “Most people ate the bread first and drank from the cup. Should I do the same?”

The young man was nervous and he was shaking his hands. The pastor smiled and said “Why not?” He took the trays and offered this young man the elements saying, “This is the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ.” He was shocked to hear that. He hesitated a bit and then took the elements.

After the service he came forward to the pastor. Before he could move, the young man threw his arms about the pastor’s shoulder and began to weep. The pastor held him as he cried.

A woman came forward and said, “I’m his wife.” She was crying, too. “He’s so embarrassed. He’s never been in a church service in his life. He has been on drugs and alcohol for years. This week he accepted Jesus as his Savior and I asked him to come to the service this morning. I told him there might be a time when he could come forward and say he had accepted Jesus. When you asked the servers to come forward, he thought that was the time. Then you handed him the communion trays, and he was confused and embarrassed. He didn’t know what to do with them.”

The pastor stepped back and looked the man in the face and said, “God loves you so much. When God saw you take that tiny step toward him, he was so overjoyed that he placed in your hands the most precious thing the church has, the sacrament of the body and blood of his Son. Then He told you to go give Jesus to other people.”⁶

The pastor is right that we are not only to receive him into our lives but also to share him with others.

⁶ Jamie Buckingham, (Milton Keynes, England: Word Publishing, 1991), pp. 31-32.