



Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 3

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

NOTE TO THE PREACHER: The Challenges of the Bread of Life Discourse

The Bread of Life discourse is clearly a profound message. The profundity is apparent from the fact that it marks the beginning of the end of Jesus' widespread popularity. After this discourse many left Jesus. The reasons they left are still reasons why people stumble or walk away from Christ today. So, it's an important series. And it presents a double challenge to the preacher.

First, there is simply the challenge of expounding a text that has several esoteric elements: the parallel between earthly and heavenly food; the provision of manna and how the Israelites viewed that; what it means to "eat" the bread of life; the need for the Father to "draw" people in. None of these are necessarily complicated. It just takes time to explain them.

Second, there's the challenge of preaching on the same discourse three weeks in a row (which is the recommendation of this series) without being redundant. There is much circling back throughout this chapter. For example, manna is first brought up by Jesus' followers in verse 30. Jesus then references manna multiple times, citing in both verse 49 and verse 58 how those who ate it still died. Verse 30 is in the gospel reading for week 1; verse 49 in week 2, and verse 58 in week 3.

Obviously, these challenges are met with careful, prayerful textual study. However, the exegesis of John 6:24-69 probably needs to be done *en toto* before writing the first sermon. It's as if the preacher is outlining a sermon that will cover three weeks.

If you own *Commentary on the Propers: Year B*, you will note how closely this worship outline follows the three weeks in that resource. The *Foundation* series and weekly promotional comments have (hopefully) distilled the voluminous information in the commentary down to something more viable for a worship folder or as a social media promo. But reading everything in the commentary for these weeks will certainly aid the preacher. The *Preacher Podcast* contributors also have carefully tried to demonstrate the distinctions in each of the weeks. Here's a summary:

- Week 1 deals with the malady of the human heart craving temporal blessings more than eternal. The connection to the feeding of the multitude is obvious. People liked that Jesus could provide a full stomach. They were not fully aware he could give them so much more.
- Week 2 builds upon week 1 by stressing the superiority of spiritual blessings above temporal ones. It allows the preacher to contrast an eternal life in glory to a very short seven or eight decades in a world that is so fundamentally broken that it is destined to be incinerated. However, week 2 also builds upon the fact that the "eating" Jesus is calling for (faith in him) is something that fallen man would never do of his own volition. Jesus speaks of the Father drawing in the elect. The other readings talk about spiritual wisdom being a gift.
- Week 3 provides opportunities for application. If Jesus is the only bread that offers eternal life, what does that mean for how we prioritize him and his Word in our temporal lives? Note that the "hard" part of Jesus' teaching isn't understanding what he is claiming. It's accepting what it means for our lives.



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SERIES EXPLANATION

“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:66). What happened?! Jesus had recently fed many thousands of people. Everywhere he went, he was mobbed by a multitude looking for the hope and healing Jesus provided. In the first part of Jesus’ ministry, he was extremely popular. That changed so quickly. At this time many followers walked away from Christ. What had Jesus done that was so bad? He said, “I am the bread of life.” That statement seems, at worst, to be cryptic. It doesn’t seem offensive. But as the crowd grasped what Jesus was claiming, they decided they no longer wanted anything to do with him.

Bread is a staple food, something people eat every day (especially in Jesus’ day). Scripture will sometimes refer to bread and water as all one needs to sustain physical life. In this worship series we will examine what Jesus is teaching when he calls himself “the bread of life.” We will discuss why people would abandon Jesus for making that claim. And we will wrestle with whether we would ever do the same. Our worship follows this path.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Spiritual Food for Those Focused on the Earthly

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Bread that Gives Wisdom and Life

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Only Food We Really Need



Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost August 11, 2024 (Proper 14B)

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR THOSE FOCUSED ON THE EARTHLY

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Physical food is a blessing from God without which we would literally wither away and die. That is why Jesus lovingly and miraculously fed thousands of followers with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Yet, while physical food is a good thing, it is far from the greatest thing God provides us. The greatest blessing God provides is spiritual food. The best thing God gives us is his Son, the bread of life. Without that spiritual food, we wither and die in a much worse way.

This week we see the multitudes coming to Jesus looking for two things: ever more temporal blessings—full bellies, healthy bodies—and an explanation of how to gain them. Jesus explains the greater need for spiritual food. He assures us that there is nothing we do to earn it. Our Father urges us to come to him for our daily bread, asking him to provide for our temporal needs. But may we hunger most for our greatest need: spiritual food that Christ freely gives.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 16:15-31 – In sending manna, a bread that stayed fresh for a short time, the LORD not only cared for Israel's physical well-being but also fortified trust that God would continue to provide.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5,11-13 – The Israelites had spiritual food in the wilderness. The pre-incarnate Christ was with them! Yet some cared more about physical blessings than spiritual ones.

*John 6:24-35 – Jesus is the bread of life.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel reading serves as the sermon text throughout this series. This week the preacher may remind his people that the way God provides for our physical needs only proves how well he will meet our spiritual needs. The old *Planning Christian Worship* referenced a common teaching of St. Augustine, that God often chooses common visible things to point to something more important that is invisible. For example, God chooses water as the earthly element in baptism, so that when we daily see water sluice away visible grit and grime, we might remember the water and the promise of baptism, in which something invisible—sin and guilt—was washed away.

The first reading supports this concept. It shows that the way God provided for the physical health of Israel was also his way of fostering spiritual health. Israel needed to trust God to provide on a daily basis, because manna lasted only one day (except for the Sabbath).

The second reading is a warning that one can have spiritual food and partake of it on occasion, and yet still be lost because of disdain for that food, preferring the temporal to the eternal.

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HYMNS

Opening	544 I Am the Bread of Life
HOD	923 Guide Me, O Though Great Jehovah
Third/Distr	591 O Holy Spirit, Grant Us Grace
Closing	509 Feed Your Children, God Most Holy

SERVICE OPTIONS

Hymn 544 obviously captures the theme of this worship series. It is challenging, as the verses are all different. Consider having a cantor/choir sing the verses, with the congregation joining in on the refrains. It could also be used each week, with the congregation hopefully being able to sing it all eventually.



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost August 18, 2024 (Proper 15B)

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

THE BREAD THAT GIVES WISDOM AND LIFE

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

There are many different theories about the healthiest way to eat. There's the old food pyramid, built on a foundation of whole grains. There's the Mediterranean diet, the Atkins diet, the Paleo diet, and many others. We can debate which is best, but what is undebatable is that whatever your diet, you are going to die. Perhaps a vegetarian diet is indeed easier on your heart. Still, your heart is going to stop eventually. But in his Bread of Life discourse, Jesus offers food that enables us to live forever.

There are foods you might never have tasted without someone working hard to convince you to try them. Likewise, this spiritual food that Jesus describes is something no one finds appealing at first, but distasteful. And so today Jesus explains that we need God to work within us, so that we have the wisdom to see that this food gives life and the faith to find this bread most delicious.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Proverbs 9:1-6 – In this poetic reading, spiritual wisdom is personified as a kind woman. Lady Wisdom invites us to dine on the spiritual food that empowers us to truly live.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16 – St. Paul explains that we need a wisdom that only the Spirit can give, a wisdom that understands that in Christ we have the bread of life.

*John 6:35-51 – Jesus declares that anyone wise enough to eat the bread of life will live forever.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

Note how the explanation of the theme of the day attempts to tackle the two points that could be made in the Gospel reading. Why is our relationship with Jesus to be of highest priority? Jesus is the only food that grants eternal life. It is a message about the simultaneous inclusivity and exclusivity of the gospel. No one is saved except through Christ. Everyone who has faith in Christ will be saved. Yet, the second paragraph of that explanation touches on the fact that no one perceives the value of that spiritual food unless they've been given the gift of faith, i.e., spiritual wisdom.

The first reading supports that message through the personified Lady Wisdom encouraging us to eat the meal she has set. The second reading simply makes the poetry of the first reading concrete.

HYMNS

Opening	528 Christ, the Word of God Incarnate
HOD	633 Speak, O Lord
Third/Distr	581 Lord, 'Tis Not That I Did Choose You
Closing	521 Christ the Eternal Lord - v1,2



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost August 25, 2024 (Proper 16B)

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

THE ONLY FOOD WE REALLY NEED

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

As Jesus concluded his Bread of Life discourse, many said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” and walked away. Read carefully. They did not say the teaching was hard to understand. The meaning was clear enough. Jesus was teaching that the only chance to enjoy eternity in heaven is through a close connection to him. He is the only bread that gives eternal life. That isn’t hard to understand, but it is hard to accept. Eating this bread means reordering our lives so that Jesus is by far our highest priority. It means loving the Blessor infinitely more than his earthly blessings. It means realizing that Jesus is the only thing we really need. If we had nothing but him, we would not lack anything that ultimately matters.

Jesus watches the multitudes walking away from him. He turns to the Twelve—he turns to us this week—and he whispers, “You do not want to leave me too, do you?” May the Spirit give us the wisdom to answer, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Joshua 24:1-2,14-18 – Joshua asks the Israelites to remain faithful to God who had brought them out of Egypt. The LORD was the only God they needed or wanted.

Hebrews 11:24-28 – In faith Moses chose to be part of the people of God rather than remaining an Egyptian prince. Being with Christ in the true Promised Land was all Moses needed or wanted.

*John 6:51-69 – When many left, the Twelve stayed with Jesus, who had the words of eternal life. The Holy One of God was all they needed or wanted.

NOTE TO THE PREACHER

Commentary on the Propers: Year B describes how this week is all about making a choice. It is careful to detail that this is not decision theology. In all three readings, the people discussed are believers who came to faith entirely through the gracious working of the Spirit. So the choice, empowered by faith, is to continue craving spiritual food, to nourish our faith through the Means God had provided. St. John does not refer to those who left Jesus as hypocrites. He calls them disciples. They genuinely wanted to follow Jesus, but when Jesus explains what that entails, they leave. This is a temptation for many today. The commentary notes how Luther paraphrased the attitude of these disciples: “To be sure, we will let You give us food and drink, but we cannot tolerate that You try and teach us and pose as our Master” (LW 23, p30). It really gets to the question of why people are following Jesus at all. Do they want the blessings or the Blessor?

The other readings support this thought, for both describe a Spirit-wrought choice made by believers: the Israelites choosing to follow the Lord rather than other gods, and Moses choosing to be part of God’s people rather than a prince in Egypt.

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HYMNS

Opening	606 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus
HOD	631 Speak, O Savior, I Am Listening
Third/Distr	826 From God Can Nothing Move Me
Closing	932 Sent Forth by God's Blessing