

“What Is Your Favorite Kind of Bread?”

John 6:25-59

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I remember my mother and grandmother for many reasons and cooking delicious meals is certainly high on the list. They were exceptionally good cooks. Regardless of the time of day or meal that had been prepared, one thing was certain. There would be plenty bread on the table and often it would be homemade. Most meals had biscuits, cornbread, yeast rolls or sourdough bread with an abundance of butter and jellies nearby.

Their biscuits were my favorite. When Jackie got into the family, she discovered why they were so good and shared their little secret with me. “They fry the bottom of the biscuit,” she told me. “Your mom puts a rather large amount of Crisco in the bottom of the pan and that is why the bottom is so crunchy while the inside is fluffy.” I did not care how they did it as long as they continued to do it. Back then, cholesterol wasn’t even on the radar screen and my motto was, “If it tastes good it is good for you.”

To this day, my favorite restaurants are the ones that serve good bread and there seems to be no shortage of them. A waiter that greets me with warm bread and butter will see me again.

The people following Jesus around the Sea of Galilee as recorded in John 6 wanted to talk about bread. So did Jesus, however, for a different reason. They wanted Jesus to perform a miracle like he had done the previous day when he multiplied the little boy’s lunch and satisfy their recurring hunger. He wanted them to know that he could do more for them, much more. As the Living Bread, he could also feed and nourish their spirits, which appeared to be malnourished.

He could give them meaning, purpose, guidance, direction, peace, security, strength, courage, confidence, comfort, wisdom, understanding, dignity, worth, forgiveness, faith, hope and love. Furthermore, he could provide this nourishment not only for a season, but for all eternity. Listen as I read several verses from his lesson in the synagogue that day.

“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” John 6:35.

“I am the bread that came down from heaven” John 6:41.

“I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread from heaven” John 6:47-48.

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world” John 6:51.

“This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever” John 6:58.

Surely, after listening to Jesus, the people opened their hearts and minds along with their mouths. Without hesitation, they let Jesus meet all their needs, didn’t they? No, I am sorry to say, they did not. And why not? I suppose there were many reasons, but I want to explore two of them. I think many refused Jesus’ offer because they let other people or other things distract them. Let me explain.

I have no doubt that the religious leaders discouraged the people from listening to and believing in Jesus. They refused to believe that he had a special relationship with God and had been sent from heaven to meet man’s deepest needs. They could not see past his humble roots as the son of a common carpenter in Nazareth. They certainly saw nothing divine about Jesus, or at least they did not want to see it and ridiculed anyone that did. This was a big hurdle for people to overcome and many could not.

Who is standing between you and Jesus discouraging you from trusting and following him with all your “heart, soul, mind and strength?” Can they meet your deepest needs? How long are you going to let them control or fool you? What are you missing by listening to them? I

contend that you are missing a lot and want to discourage you from letting anyone keep you from developing a close relationship with Jesus.

This week, I read about the return to Fort Stewart of the 3rd Infantry Divisions' s Charlie Company. This unit was a part of about 750 troops from the 2nd Brigade that fought in Iraq. Charlie Company was at the forefront of the attack on Baghdad on April 5 and later returned to secure and police the city.

Of great interest to me were the pictures of reunited families that accompanied the articles. The expressions of joy mixed with tears were in abundance.

As I looked at the pictures and thought about the men and women that had been separated from their families for almost a year, I wondered what could have kept these soldiers and their families apart upon their arrival home? I can think of nothing or no one. I pity the person that would have tried.

Our need to be close to Jesus should be as strong as the need for these families to be reunited. We should never let anyone separate us from him or keep us from developing a close relationship with him. Far too much is at stake.

Secondly, I believe others did not allow Jesus to do more than feed their body because they lived solely in the physical realm. For many, their world consisted only of what they could see, feel and touch. They lived in the midst of such harsh conditions that finding ways to survive consumed them. All they wanted Jesus to do was provide their immediate physical needs, which were many.

In looking at this story, you have to ask why Jesus was not enthused about large numbers of people clamoring for him. Any leader would relish this kind of attention and response. Why was Jesus different?

I believe it was because the people were seeking the wrong things from him. Had they approached him that day and said, "Jesus, we know that you can meet our physical needs and fill our stomachs. We think, however, that you can do so much more. Would you teach us how to control unhealthy appetites that lurk within all of us, how to conquer selfishness, how to control our tempers, how to resist temptation, how to discern what is really important and pursue it, how to be more gracious and peace-loving and how to develop a closer relationship with God?" Had the people requested these things from him, I believe he would have been ecstatic!

Are you asking Jesus for the wrong things, or at least not enough things? Are you so preoccupied with the present and the physical that you are overlooking those things that could truly enhance your quality of life and make you a better mate, parent, child, student, athlete, artist, employer, employee and neighbor?

Do not let the desire for anything this world has to offer keep you from experiencing all that Jesus has to offer. Don't spend all your time satisfying your physical needs and then become content once they have been met. There is more, so much more to life and Jesus.

What unmet needs do you have because you have not allowed Jesus to feed your spirit? And why have you not allowed him to do what he was sent by the Father to do for you? What keeps you from tasting the Living Bread and finding a richer quality of life? Where else have you looked for this life? How frustrated are you? Would you let him feed and nourish your spirit this morning and every morning by opening your heart and mind to him, trusting and following him?

Before you make your decision, listen to the words of Reverend Debra Metzgar Shew, vicar and director of Emmaus House, an inner-city ministry in Atlanta.

"It is strange, this food called Jesus. We consume it, take it into ourselves like ordinary bread. We begin to digest it till it becomes part of us. But then, this Bread of Life does something else, something the ordinary bread doesn't do. This bread, this food, this Jesus begins to consume us, begins to make us a part of him. We are used to consuming our food, but now our food consumes us. And in that consumption, we ourselves become non-perishable. We ourselves become food for the world—living loaves."

As much as I loved my mother and grandmother's biscuits, they cannot compare to the Living Bread I have tasted and the nourishment Jesus has provided. I hope you will open your heart and let him feed your spirit, too.