

Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

The Bread of Life – Part Two

John 6.41ff

2.9.14

Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."⁴² They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves.⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."⁴⁵ "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.⁴⁶ "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father."⁴⁷ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life."⁴⁸ "I am the bread of life."⁴⁹ "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died."⁵⁰ "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

⁵² *Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves."⁵⁴ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."⁵⁵ "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink."⁵⁶ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."⁵⁷ "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me."⁵⁸ "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.*

⁶⁰ *Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"⁶¹ But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"⁶² "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?"⁶³ "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."⁶⁴ "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.⁶⁵ And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."*

⁶⁶ *As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."⁶⁹ "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"⁷¹ Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.*

This is the season of the year when St. Andrews Church looks at the Gospels. Between Christmas and Easter each year our sermons focus on the life of Jesus Christ as found in the “source documents” – i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...

And for the second year in a row we’re using the theme of food. We REALLY see it here in this text, that Jesus Christ will often use these metaphors and symbols and parables of FOOD and EATING to tell about God... And HERE, one of the most evocative of all these analogies, where He describes HIMSELF as the FOOD THAT CAN IMPART LIFE TO A HUNGRY SOUL, the Bread that comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world: “I AM the Bread of Life”

This is the second look at this “Bread of Life Discourse” and today we see it as the cause of what scholars call The Galilean Crisis. The words of Jesus in this interchange with religious people, here in a place of worship in Galilee, these words incite a crisis. And the conversation ends with a crowd divided, a fork in the road: “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore...”

This is what Thomas Kuhn called “a paradigm shift” and those who refuse to make the shift and change their conception of religion...of life and happiness... and meaning and spirituality and Karma ... and about WHY Jesus came into the world (what we need from Him) – those who won’t undergo a fundamental change will not be happy with Jesus (and as we’ll see, will not be happy with happiness itself) and many will walk away. It becomes an opportunity for US to re-think some of our own core assumptions.

Let’s look at 1) A Prevailing Mindset 2) The Counter-intuitive Difference 3) Implementing the Alternative

One of the reasons why the early Christians were criticized was that their religion was so “un-religious”. There were no temples or cathedrals (they often met in homes). There were no priests or practitioners (very little clergy/laity distinction); no very elaborate set of rules or laws; no ornate rituals or ceremonies.

And when the crowds (many of whom considered themselves His disciples) when they came to Jesus Christ virtually everyone found that their prevailing mindset for what a world-view or a religion or an approach to spirituality or a method for attaining happiness and a good life – everyone found that these assumptions (the prevailing mindset) was being fundamentally challenged.

There were facets of their way of thinking that, for them, were SO basic...so unassailable and fixed that they couldn’t possibly be refuted. They were like universal absolutes.

It’s funny how we get these ideas... every culture and society has them. I was discussing the prevailing American mindset on “the Golden Years” – ya’ know, what you do after you retire. We ASSUME...that it’s going to take a lot of money because we have to live on our own...BUT in

most cultures... people live out their retirement years with their children and grandchildren...AND that's just ONE example where we assume that our way is THE WAY...and "how else could retirement possibly be?" A prevailing mindset.

Most of our assumptions are rarely examined (we don't even know we have them or that there are other approaches) and even more rarely changed ...and SOME of our prevailing mindsets are due NOT only to our cultural orientation as South Floridians or Americans or Westerners but ... because we're human and we're FALLEN. AND therefore we think about God and meaning and happiness and life and spirituality and ethics and ALL KINDS OF BASIC facets of reality – there are prevailing mindsets and assumptions that we never even question.

The crowds AND the disciples and the Twelve apostles believed things and assumed things... because they were First Century Jewish people...living in the Roman Empire AND because they were human.

They assumed things about history and about the purpose of life...about God...about religion...happiness AND OF COURSE about the long awaited Christ or Messiah...

One of the things they believed...which, basically, all people still ASSUME is that God helps those who help themselves. All religions have some version of this, some basic belief in KARMA, or the Tao or Law or the principle of "sowing and reaping", for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction, what goes around comes around, quid pro quo, good people are blessed and bad people get sick or get cursed or go to Hell. It's up to us to work the program and climb the ladder ... and produce. (It's how it happens at work...and ...with God.)

And these people (as I said, ALL people) they believed these things about God and spiritual life and ethical life...and happiness...and about why we need a Messiah or a Christ – so He could judge the bad people and reward the good people (like us!) and could teach us good people how to be...you know...a little better...give us a tweak/fine-tuning!

I wonder how many people believe that about the Church – that THIS is the basic teaching of Christianity. How many people in your life (maybe some sitting in the sanctuary today!) how many people believe that Jesus Christ came to teach good people how to get to heaven how to help themselves ... because God helps those who help themselves!

So...on that day...after the feeding of the 5000... and when they came looking for bread (maybe even wanted to know how THEY could multiply bread like He did – how they could work the work of God) on that day, there was a crisis.

Jesus Christ not only called them to see their assumptions and not only challenged the prevailing mindset...but turned it all upside-down. He offers this counterintuitive alternative to all religion and all KARMA and all spiritual/moral/self-help programs.

Look at (5) features He highlights: First, this is not a program that originates with us and then works up to heaven...or achieves happiness...or attains a reward for those who are extra disciplined and deserving. THIS DOES NOT GO FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN BUT FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH. This is food which comes down from above. This is God coming down to US. I am the bread that came down out of heaven. Counterintuitive ORIGINS.

Second, counterintuitive ACCESS: no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...as it is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God'... It is NOT something we can learn or study our way into it...It's Not really a matter of education or intelligence. It's an inward liberation that only God the Father can produce or generate. The prophets called it a "new heart" - They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them..." (Jer 31.34). It's not like religion where we're afraid to be judged and we desperately want people to approve of us so we try real hard – external stimuli and pressure keeping us on the straight and narrow. No, this is an internal liberation, God setting the heart free to know Him...

And Jesus Christ says over and over again that the LIBERATED HEART, drawn by God is the heart that is fed on this food from above ...and the process of eating this food...is called Believing... "He who Believes... Believe... Believe." A counterintuitive way of ACCESS – not the smart, the disciplined, the worthy...but those set free to believe, access by faith.

Third, counterintuitive effects of this alternative way: He calls it LIFE. It's LIVING bread...bread of LIFE. This bread gives LIFE to the world....if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever... unless you eat this bread you have no life in yourselves... As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me, he also will live because of Me..."

He speaks about something more than just heaven and life after death...it's as if EVEN IN THE HERE AND NOW we are not truly alive, i.e. until we EAT this we have NOT really begun to live...as if the diagnosis in the Garden - "the day you eat of it, you shall surely DIE" - that death which came upon our whole race is only NOW reversed when God puts a new heart in us...and gives us this New Life...living bread.

Fourth, this one unique alternative to all religion/spirituality/self-help/morality - this Bread of life is made of a counterintuitive substance – "THIS BREAD I GIVE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD IS MY FLESH!" And this was something they couldn't swallow – He is referring here to His own death.

This is Jesus Christ saying that He, the eternal Son of God who had NO BEGINNING...He had to be become substantial...physical...the Mind of God, the Logos became flesh...and this FLESH will be torn and pierced and HE WILL DIE for the sins of His people.

They had no place in their prevailing mindset for a Messiah who would die... They didn't see how bad their condition was. They needed tweaking...some fine-tuning...some education...some advice...an example.

Jesus Christ is saying, "Your condition is far worse than you imagine – YOU NEED A SUBSTITUTE! I must give you My whole self... My flesh...My blood ... My death." There is an unbreakable balance that must be restored – sin cannot just be made to go away. If God is TRULY just then the debts of His people must be paid... and death is the penalty. A counterintuitive solution – God must take on flesh and pay the penalty that justice requires.

And finally, a counterintuitive CRISIS: at the end of this description of the one living alternative to our dead self-help and morality and religion – the one great solution that comes down from God (the alternative to our ridiculous Tower of Babel that rises from earth and aims for heaven) – when Jesus Christ said these things in that house of worship in Galilee...There is a counterintuitive scandal...

Some undergo a complete paradigm-shift and others walk away. "Does this cause you to stumble (to 'scandalizomai') – are you scandalized? If you can't hear that I came down to you...if you won't make the shift then YOU WILL BE UNPREPARED to see Me go up...I will now be your Savior...I will then be your Judge. Only My Father can give you faith to believe."

Then, many go away. The Twelve are asked, "Will you go away also?"...And the Twelve Tribes of the New Israel reply, "we will not grumble like the Old Israel in the wilderness and as they continue to do...we will cling to You even though we don't get it...only YOU have the words of eternal life...where else can we go?"

And then a mysterious mention of Judas – who stays in body but has already departed in spirit...he was one of the Twelve.

Now, if this Way, counter to the way we think of things in our fallen-ness, if this is the Un-Religion and the One way of life then how do we undergo the shift and how to implement this Living Way?

Let me talk about COMING, GOING and RETURNING:

First, you may be COMING to the Gospel and just considering Christianity...and maybe there are parts of it that...just don't feel right to you... It could be the sexual ethic in Christianity...could be some opinion you have of the Church...the exclusivity of what Jesus claimed about Himself...AND YOU MAY THINK, "It was easy for those early Christians but, HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE IN THE MODERN WORLD..." Well, truth is – it was hard for them to believe too. Paul said the two prevailing mindsets in his day (Jewish worldview and Graeco-Roman worldview) they both found Christianity counterintuitive. Here's Paul: 1Cor 1.23-24 "but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and

Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” If you think you can sort of slip in the back pew and not have to stumble...you should think again. BUT...maybe, you sense God calling you, giving you a new heart...well, trust Him. Meet some other Christians and work through your issues. You will find help and will find answers.

Second, the Father loves to give people to the Son. “All the Father gives me will come to Me and I will raise them up on the last day...” So, you who believe: Go! Go tell people. God loves to give people to the Son. It’s not religious salesmanship or smooth words that get people to believe...God brings people to life and then gives them Bread to sustain their faith. Just tell the story and see what God may do.

Last, do you see youSELF in this story? Maybe you're a disciple and have really begun to be scandalized by something. It could be some teaching in the Bible you find hard (“This is a hard word...” v.60). Maybe it’s a hard providence – i.e. the way God has ordered your life (loss or divorce or how your life is turning out) and you just feel like “grumbling” or even feel like walking away...Well, what do you do?

Well, walking is really the process of falling forward and then catching yourself...and then repeating that again and again. And the spiritual walk is LIKE that. You get off-kilter again and again, fall ahead and He catches you...again and again.

Simon Peter and the Twelve didn’t get it. This talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood... It was a scandal to them too...BUT GOD REALLY HAD CALLED THEM AND TAUGHT THEM ... They saw Jesus Christ for who He really was...so they went off balance...fell a little and then caught themselves (or were caught BY Him)...Walking’s not always graceful and smooth but keep going...keep RETURNING to Him.

Be completely honest with Jesus Christ as if He were a real Person...because He is...tell Him your doubts and fears...keep eating...keep believing...keep returning...keep trusting.

He has the words of eternal life so...where else can we go?