

FOREVER BREAD

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John 6:35, 41-51

A lot of you use Facebook. You use it to communicate with your friends and family, to follow the news, to share photos and videos, and much more. Some people claim that they couldn't live without Facebook. They need it in their lives. However, despite how many people use and rely on Facebook, one fact cannot be questioned—despite its great popularity, Facebook is never mentioned in the Bible. Not once does our scripture address the reality of Facebook. The reason for this is obvious. Facebook did not exist 2000 years ago. But also, Facebook is simply not crucial to our existence.

Now, I am just picking on Facebook. There are lots of things in our lives that we won't find scripture—automobiles, viral videos, Starbucks, Harry Potter.

There is one thing, however, that is crucial to our lives that we encounter throughout scripture. And that is something so commonplace that we tend to overlook it or, at the least, take it for granted. And that is food. From beginning to end, we can find references to food throughout our Bible. Why is this? It is because without food we would surely perish. And God uses food in God's ongoing conversations with God's people. For example, God commands the first people not to eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. But they do. When the Israelites are fleeing Egypt, God commands them to roast a lamb and have a meal. In the story of Daniel, Daniel, a captive in the court of the king of Babylon, refuses to eat the food from the king's kitchen. It is not the food of his God. In the 23rd Psalm, the psalmist praises God for preparing a table in the face of his enemies. Throughout scripture, God uses food in the telling of God's story.

Food is a source of sustenance. It is the fuel that powers our bodies. Without food we grow weak and die.

Because of the importance of food in our lives, it is also a ritual for us. We bond around food. Meals are a building block for community. If you want to get to know someone, you share a meal with them.

Earlier, before this service, we gathered together in the Fellowship Hall for breakfast. We ate together, we shared stories, we built community.

It is because of the significance of food in our lives that it is *especially* powerful when Jesus proclaims, I am the bread of life. Jesus draws on our deep relationship with food when he connects himself to bread—one of our most common foods. He is making the claim that, like bread, he is crucial to life. But not only is he bread, he further explains that he is the bread from heaven.

This term 'bread from heaven' would immediately cause the people hearing it to remember the story of the Israelites' trek across the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan, from slavery to freedom, from a place without God to a place with God. As you will recall, that journey was not without its challenges. The trip took far longer than they expected. And then there was the matter of food. There was not enough of it. Out in the wilderness, away from Egypt, the people were running out of food. The people complained to God and God answered by sending them food in the form of manna—manna, that bread from heaven. Each day, the people would wake up and find the manna lying across the landscape for them to gather and eat. They were only to gather enough for that day. If they tried to stockpile the manna it would quickly spoil. Everyone was dependent each day on God for the manna. This daily manna sustained the people in their journey to salvation. It was a continuing reminder of God's promise to them—the promise of salvation.

And today, we hear Jesus proclaim that he is now the bread from heaven. Not only is he the bread from heaven, he says, *Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* Unlike the manna which had a shelf life, Jesus is eternal.

But Jesus sets himself apart from just regular bread. To a starving person, bread may be the difference between life and death. But Jesus is talking about a different life. He says to the people, "Do you remember the story about how your ancestors in the wilderness were fed each day by God's manna? God sustained them through their journey. But ultimately, they did die. They died at the end of their lives.

Jesus points out that not only is he the bread from heaven, he is more. He is the bread of life. He says, *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.* That is the promise of our faith. We follow the one who offers more than worldly wealth and comfort. We put our faith in the one who offers salvation, eternal salvation.

We put this belief into practice through the sacrament of communion. Together, we eat the bread that represents Jesus and his promise of salvation.

Today is World Communion Sunday. When we gathered at the table we did so in the belief that the church of Jesus Christ is universal. It is not Presbyterian, or Methodist, or Catholic, or Orthodox. It is open and available to all.

As part of our recognition of World Communion, we organized yesterday's food packaging event for the organization Rise Against Hunger. Our goal was to package 10,000 bags of rice, vegetables, and soy. To do so we needed to raise \$3400. We did that. Your gifts even exceeded that amount and so yesterday 53 of you gave up a Saturday morning and came to the church and pack 11,406 food packages. That will provide 68,436 meals. These bags will be shipped to where people are hungry. These meals are not gourmet, but they are sufficient. They are like manna—they meet the

needs for the day and allow people to continue their journey out of whatever wilderness they find themselves in.

Yesterday, we had fun. We gathered at tables and made food. Some of us gathered early to unload the truck and set up tables. We visited with friends; we made friends. We built community. And, last but not least, we wore hair nets. There was a joy to our work knowing that it served a purpose.

I am so very proud not just to call myself a follower of Christ but to be part of this particular congregation. We don't just embrace our Savior for ourselves, we respond joyfully in discipleship and in servanthood. We are not just *hearers of the word* but, as we read in the Letter of James, we are *doers of the word* (James 1:22-25).

Jesus said in our reading, *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* Let us always answer the call to dine at the table with our Lord. Amen.