

Sixth Sunday of Easter - May 5, 2024

John 6:35–40

“I am the bread of life”

1. In Mexican culture, we sense there is a deep connection between feelings and food
 - a. And I’m not talking about eating out of emotional needs, like eating a lot of potato chips when we’re feeling down in the dumps.
 - b. It’s more a connection with how feelings become present in the food being prepared.
 - i. For example, if you’re at a restaurant, or eating at a friend’s house, and the homemade salsa/hot sauce is really spicy, it’s likely someone will pipe up and say: “Wow, I guess the cook was really mad when they made this!”
 - c. There is a book titled *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel (which was made into a movie) which is part cookbook, part period romantic drama, part fantastical novel.
 - i. Set in the chaotic years of the Mexican revolution in the early 1900s, this is ultimately a story of frustrated love
 - ii. In a key scene, the female star is put in the difficult position of being the caterer for a wedding where the love of her life was getting married to someone else.
 - iii. She is absolutely distraught, but in true heroine fashion, she rises above the drama and goes about her tasks to feed the wedding guests
 - iv. But, when it comes time to prepare the wedding cake, her emotions get the best of her.
 - v. As she is making the cake batter, a solitary tear falls from her cheek, and accidentally gets mixed in with the other ingredients.
 - vi. Then, when the wedding cake is served to the guests, as they eat it, they get flooded with a deep sense of sadness. Her sadness.
 - d. Maybe it’s a little bit like the expression “You are what you eat” only maybe the guests didn’t exactly know what they were in for.
2. In our Gospel passage, Jesus’ expression “I am the bread of life” fits well into a biblical poetic tradition which uses eating to connect humans to God and God’s wisdom
 - a. There was a sense that, to really take in the meaning of God’s teaching and laws, it was like eating the words God was giving us, to make them a part of us
 - i. Jeremiah wrote: Your words were found [O God], and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart... Jer 15:16
 - ii. The Psalmist wrote:
 1. How sweet are your words to my taste [O God], sweeter than honey to my mouth! Psalm 119:103
 2. O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in [God]. Psalm 34:8
 - b. Plus right before our Gospel passage, we hear of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with 5 loaves and then he talks with the crowd about God giving the people manna in the

- desert, and after the passage Jesus freaks everyone out by talking figuratively about eating his body and drinking his blood
- c. In that context Jesus says “I am the bread of life. The person who comes to me will never be hungry and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”
 - i. Perkins professor Jaime Clark-Soles offers a neat angle: Here Jesus takes on a traditionally female role, like our sweet grandma who feeds us and teaches us how to behave. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/bread-of-life/commentary-on-john-635-59-2>
 - ii. With Jesus we have life, life that never ends, life which fills us, quenches our soul.
 - iii. Think of it like this: Jesus has BECOME the WORD of God, has even taken on the BODILY presence of GOD among us. Jesus is God’s love EMBODIED.
 - iv. As the beginning of John says “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”
 - d. So, Jesus is saying that the wisdom he embodies is the Word of God, and that wisdom represents the eternal love God has for us, which leads to eternal life
 - i. Why bother with the junk food of empty religious rituals, when you have the bread of life right here?
 - ii. Why get full on empty calories of selfish teachings, when Jesus offers real nourishment?
 - e. If we take Jesus seriously, as he walked the talk of God’s grace for all, of radical hospitality, of a dedication to community, if we understand it seriously enough to take it all in and let it become a part of us, we might find Jesus’ teachings as sweet as honey, as essential to life as bread.
3. When we are at this table, we celebrate that we become companions seeking to take in and live out the fullness of Jesus’ teachings.
 - a. The word companion comes from a Latin root that means: with bread. So literally, when we share bread together we’re companions, and here companions in faith
 - b. Having bread baking here in the sanctuary today was a way to let that aroma help us participate in this sacrament anew.
 - i. It is a way to feel our way into the idea that WE embody the presence of Jesus in the world, that Jesus helps us EMBODY love and grace.
 - ii. Jesus said I am the bread of life, and since we also make the connection that the church is the body of Christ, then together we’re like a loaf baking ready to be God’s instrument to nurture the community with God’s love, and welcome and mercy.
 4. What a wonderful thing it is, beloved, that we are companions in this journey of faith. What a joyful thing it is that as we are fed by the Word of God, it is what makes us gracious, forgiving, courageous, prayerful, justice-focused. The Bread of Life feeds us and allows us to feed others. We are what we eat, for real.

Reflection questions

1. Share a story of a memorable meal you had which brings a smile to your face (it could be a single meal or the aggregate memory of meals at your grandma’s house, for example).

2. What do you think Jesus meant when he said “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35–40)?
3. What do you do which feeds people emotionally or spiritually?