

## “Bread”

John 6:1-15, 25-35

October 5, 2025/World Communion Sunday

1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church of Sharon

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### I. Introduction

Bread. A basket was brought not long after we sat down. There were seven of us at a nice restaurant; friends meeting for dinner. The basket was placed in the middle of the table and held different kinds of bread: sour dough rolls, crispy bread sticks, slices of honey wheat bread, flat bread with asiago cheese. You could smell the bread when it was set on the table. And it was still warm. Butter and olive oil were set beside it. The basket didn't sit there for long. Everyone took a piece and passed the basket around. The bread seemed to add to the already happy occasion.

Bread. It is a part of most ancient cultures. When people learned to domesticate and grow grains like wheat, corn, rye, and barley, bread began to appear. Nomadic cultures then became more settled, growing crops and raising livestock. Bread became a staple on most tables. Archeologists tell us that the first bread appeared almost 12,000 years ago; probably a type of tough flat bread. But I bet it still smelled good as it baked.

Bread. I like bread. And I like many types of bread. Sadly my doctor told me I need to “watch my carbs” so there is less bread on my table. But when I do take a piece it is still enjoyable. Especially if it's warm with some butter.

Bread. It seems to speak about something basic in human life. It's like something we all share, and all can share. That's why a basket of bread was set on the table of seven friends. It spoke of sharing and building community. And that's especially true when the basket is passed.

### II. Text and Brief Exegesis

Bread. That's what our text is about on this World Communion Sunday. We know the story as the feeding of the 5000. And it is the only miracle story told in all four gospels. Evidently Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all saw something in the story that was of value to them in telling their stories about Jesus.

John tells us that a large crowd was following Jesus. They had seen and heard of the healings he had done. And that attracted attention. People began to see the healings as signs that Jesus was filled with the mysterious power of God. And so they came to see for themselves. And they began to wonder.

A “not so small” detail mentioned in the story is that “Passover was near.” Passover is the annual celebration remembering the salvation of God that freed Israel from Egyptian slavery and provided food for them in the wilderness. Specifically, the food to be remembered is “manna,” a

type of bread. John invites us to see the feeding of the 5000 as a “2<sup>nd</sup> type of Passover” as God acts again to save and provide in the wilderness, just in a different way.

There are a lot more than seven friends gathering around a dinner table. The story says 5000. The need is great. A daily worker’s wage for six months wouldn’t even be enough to give everyone a piece of the crust. But there is also a quiet whisper of faith. That’s how it is sometimes. There is a boy with five small loaves and two fish. But what difference might that make? They will soon find out.

Jesus took, gave thanks, and gave the bread and the fish. It is the language of a miracle. And it is also the early church language of communion. We are to see this as both a miracle story, a “sign” of God’s power in Jesus. And we are to see this story as a communion story, and look for the presence of the risen Christ when we take, give thanks, and give a cup and bread. In fact, the Greek word for “give thanks” is “eucharistuo.” It’s the origin of the word “eucharist,” another word for communion.

And there’s an abundance in the hands of Jesus. Leftovers are collected. People there see it all as another “sign.” Jesus is a prophet and more. It was believed that when the Messiah, God’s chosen Savior, came he would provide bread like Moses provided manna in the wilderness. They have all just seen it. So they want to make Jesus a king; the Messiah with a political agenda.

Indeed they have just seen a sign. But they do not know what it means. In fact, they get it wrong. So Jesus separates himself from the “would be political movement.” And then John’s question comes: what about us? Do we know what the feeding of the 5000 means? Now that’s a good question.

There was a young woman taking an art appreciation class. For her final paper she went to the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh and asked a docent to show her all the most important paintings in the museum and tell her a little about each one. And so as the docent talked, she wrote down all the artists’ names, dates and titles and influences and innovations with color and shape and form. She looked more at her notebook than the paintings.

By the end her notebook was full. She was ready to go back to her computer and start writing. But then the docent said, “Come with me.” And he took her back to the first painting they visited. And the docent said, “Now stand back from the painting and take a look. Take your time. What do you see? What do you feel? What do you wonder about? What story do you think the artist is telling?” And it was only then that she began to really understand art appreciation.

The Gospel of John is like that docent. The writer will tell the stories like the other Gospel writers do. But then he says, “Come with me. Take another look at the story. Take your time. What do you see? What do you feel? What do you wonder about? And most importantly, what do you BELIEVE?”

And so that happens here. Our second reading is the docent taking us back to the painting of the feeding of the 5000. But this time, we’re asked to take another look, take our time, and wonder about the story being told and what we feel and believe.

### **Read John 6:25-35.**

Bread. When we take a second longer look, we begin to see that this story is really about something more than bread. It's really about Jesus. That's who John wants us to see. That's the story he wants to tell. And he invites us to wonder and believe.

Jesus invites his disciples to see more than the miracle of bread. And it's here that bread becomes a type of metaphor. As bread fills a physical hunger, do they see the "signs" of the mystery of God in Jesus that fills the hunger in a soul? This bread gives new life and eternal life. And this bread comes from the Son of Man, the one who comes from God to bring salvation and new life.

But the disciples still don't see it. They think Jesus is talking about some type of magical bread that they can earn and eat for new and eternal life. A type of "Wonder Bread." Finally Jesus says, "It's not a loaf of bread. Do you get it? What I'm talking about is belief. It's belief in the one God has sent."

A light now begins to shine for the disciples. But they still don't completely understand what Jesus is saying. So they want a sign. They want some type of further proof from Jesus. And what they are thinking about is Passover and Moses giving manna and the promise of the Messiah to provide bread like Moses. So they're wondering, "Was the feeding of the 5000 that sign? Will Jesus give them another sign? Is Jesus the promised Messiah?"

And it's here that Jesus invites these disciples and us to understand what's really going on in this feeding of the 5000. Generations ago it was never about manna and Moses. It was always about the God who provides the manna and invites belief. And so it is here again. It's not really about the bread and the feeding of 5000. It's about belief in the God who acts to feed the deepest hunger in human hearts. Sadly, we still get caught up in the blessing and miss the one who gives the blessing.

But now the disciples are starting to see what Jesus is talking about. So they ask for that bread. They want the bread that meets the deepest needs and hopes and desires in their hearts. They want the bread that brings new and eternal life. Where is it? How is it? Who is it?

And it's then that we get the biggest statement in the whole story. For John the feeding of the 5000 is all about this. Where is this bread from God that meets the needs in the human heart? "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). The bread of life is Jesus. That's what John "the docent" in the art museum wants us to see. Jesus is the bread of life that brings God's salvation. Do you see? Do you believe?

### **III. Brief Theological Reflection**

We begin a new sermon series today. The sermon series will be in John and cover the seven "I Am" sayings. It appears that seven times in the Gospel of John, Jesus makes clear

declarations about who he is, beginning with the words “I am.” Today, because it’s World Communion Sunday, I decided to start with “I am the Bread of life.”

“I Am.” The Greek is “ego eimi.” Theologians have long wondered if something theologically important is being said. And they have made connections to the important story in Exodus 3 where we first hear the name of God; “Yahweh” in Hebrew. “Yahweh.” It means “I am,” or “I am who I am,” or “I will be who I will be.” “Yahweh.” And in Greek it is translated as...”ego eimi.”

The Gospel of John has what’s called a “high Christology.” That means that in some mysterious way the holy God is present in Jesus Christ. And if we look closely we can see it. In fact, in John 14:9 Jesus says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” “Yahweh.” “Ego eimi.” “I am the Bread of Life.” So in this story of the feeding of the 5000 and bread and Jesus, what do we see of God? Take a look. Take your time. What do you see? Or more importantly, what do you believe?

Today we live in a time of deep hunger. Sometimes it appears as greed. Sometimes as fear. Sometimes as anger. Sometimes as depression. Sometimes as loneliness and loss. So we chase power, and stuff, and relationships. And we try to deaden the pain with distractions and addictions. We need more than bread. We need the Bread of Life. We need bread that gives new and eternal life. We need to rest in the mystery and grace of the holy God.

On this World Communion Sunday, gather around this table with seven friends, or 5000 friends, or the community of Christians around the world. You are welcome. You are invited. And share a cup and bread with the one who is the Bread of Life. See and believe.