**Bread of Life**

When I was a young boy and I got hungry, I would ask my mom what was there to eat. Often she would say, have a piece of bread. While that wasn’t the most interesting food choice, it would satisfy my hunger quickly and easily and to this day, I really do enjoy good bread.

Bread, in its numerous and varied forms, may be the most widely consumed food in the world. It’s an important source of nutrition, it’s versatile, portable, convenient, and it’s been around for thousands of years. Bread is mentioned nearly five hundred times in the Bible. It was certainly familiar and important for the people to whom Jesus preached. It is fitting that Jesus would have used bread as a symbol to teach them about God. He got their attention by feeding the multitude. He filled their physical hunger. Now he means to fill their spiritual hunger as well. We hunger, too, both physically and spiritually. We too, are looking for something to satisfy our hungry hearts.

Today’s reading finds Jesus in Capernaum across the Sea of Galilee from where he had fed them with the miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes. Last week’s Gospel reading ended with the same verse as the beginning of today’s: Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Notice how he begins with the words, “I am…” This recalls God’s identification of Himself to Moses in the book of Exodus. Jesus confronts crowd with their disbelief and tries to tell them their belief in Him will lead to eternal life. It’s no wonder that the Jews (that is, the religious leaders) begin to complain about him. This complaining echoes Exodus again as the Israelites complained as they hungered in the wilderness. The Jews thought they knew Jesus: he was the son of Joseph, an apparently uneducated man from Nazareth. How dare he say that he is the bread of life that came down from heaven!

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Case for Christianity,* “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said wouldn’t be a great moral teacher. He’d either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he’s a poached egg—or else he’d be the devil… You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is the Son of God, or else he is a madman or something worse.” The complainers seemed to be leaning to the latter in their assessment of Jesus. Then Jesus tells them to stop complaining. He seems to caution them by saying, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.” The verb drawn as used might also be translated as dragged. I either sense, there is a connotation of resistance. As William Barclay notes, “One cannot come to Jesus on one’s own.” That is why we need to be drawn, or dragged, as it were. There may be some choice in the matter, but if we really know God, we will allow ourselves to be drawn to Jesus. Jesus paraphrases Isaiah 54:13 saying, “And they shall be taught by God.” Ginger Barfield writes,

“Here the teaching is from God and the learning from that teaching will result in coming to Jesus.” This drawing and teaching from God require a believing response. Our response is to believe in Jesus and accept His offer to feed us. An what an offer it is! If we eat this bread, that is, accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we will have eternal life! Unlike the manna in the wilderness, and like regular bread—after we eat it, inevitably we’ll be hungry again. And, of course, we all will die, physically. This Jesus, the Bread that came down from heaven, is our way to eternal life. Jesus defines this eternal life later in this Gospel in 17:3 as He prays, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. This eternal life in the opposite of eternal condemnation; it is the promise of a life free from death: “Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

Jesus offers His flesh, His own life to save us. His offer did not extend just to the Israelites. As He said in verse 51, “the bread that will give for the life of the *world* is my flesh.” This universal salvation is available to *everyone.*

Last weekend, Karen and I were in New York City visiting our niece who was there for the summer. As we walked around Greenwich Village, we noticed as vacant storefront with a rather odd decorating scheme. Inside, hanging from the ceiling were several bags of Wonder Bread. I thought about this strange sight and it made me thing about this Bread of Life we have in Jesus. It’s not Wonder Bread, but *Wonderful Bread!*  Indeed, it’s not just the Bread of Life but also the Bread of Love. Earlier in this Gospel, John tells us, “No one have ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made Him known.”

God gave made Himself known to us in Jesus, because He loves us. How else can we respond to that love except by loving God? That love of God should turn to loving others, who are indeed made in the image of God.

Are you hungry? Have some bread. Accept the Bread of Life from heaven and satisfy your hungry heart.