

SERMONSECOND  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

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460 East Main Street

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*The Bread of Life*

John 6:24-35

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A three-year-old was in church when the wine and communion wafers were offered to the congregation. He was very interested in this, and started to get up. His mother leaned over and told him that he was not old enough to partake in the Communion.

Later, when the collection plate came by, he ignored it. His mother again leaned over and tried to coax the nickel out of him. He steadfastly refused, stating, “If I can’t eat, I’m not paying.”

Hunger is a major concern in the world today. It always has been. In Scripture we read of famines which affected the lives of God’s people. Today we see and read about the multitudes in Africa, Asia, and South America who face food insecurity. Just last week Mission Co-Workers Jeremy and Luta Garbat-Welch stated how the people of Malawi were faced with food insecurity.

Hunger is not just a problem over there, but also right here in our backyard. A Kentucky Association of Food Banks study reveals that 17% of the population in Kentucky is food insecure – 743,310 people, including 222,380 children.

Food insecurity is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

The 2016 report found that nearly 17%, that’s one in six people, in Kentucky struggles with hunger at some point during the year. This is higher than the national rate of nearly 15%. While the rate has decreased since 2011, the prevalence of food insecurity across counties remains historically high since 2008.

## Key local findings:

- Food insecurity exists in every county in Kentucky.
- Wolfe County has the highest food insecurity rate in the state, at 22.8%. Oldham County has the lowest food insecurity rate in the state, at 9%.
- Children are at a higher risk of food insecurity; 22% of Kentucky’s children are food-insecure. Eleven Kentucky counties have childhood insecurity rates of 30% or higher: 29.8% of Kentuckians in food-insecure households have incomes above 185% of the

poverty line, making them likely ineligible for most federal nutrition assistance programs.

- The “Food Budget Shortfall” – the additional dollars food-insecure Kentuckians report needing to meet their food needs – was \$346,164,000.

<http://www.kyagr.com/Kentucky-AGNEWS/2016/Hunger-study-finds-food-insecurity-levels-remain-historically-high.html>

Bread remains the universal symbol of food, nourishment, and sustenance for most of the human race. In one form or another, it is consumed daily by most human beings around the world.

Which is why God sent us bread of a different kind, in the form of his Son Jesus Christ. Yet, millions of people around the world are starving to death spiritually because they are not receiving the benefit from this unique bread that God has sent them.

Here in this 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus lays great emphasis on the origin of the living bread. Six times the phrase, “which came down from Heaven” is repeated in this dialogue beginning with the reference to manna which the Israelites ate after their deliverance from Egypt.

Jesus’ statement about his being the “Bread of Life” is part of a very long discussion that takes up most of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter. Bread first appears in this chapter in the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Significantly this takes place at the time of Passover, the most sacred festival of the Jewish year in which bread plays a major role.

Jesus’ teaching which takes place the next day revolves entirely around the theme of spiritual food. During this dialogue Jesus identifies himself three times as Bread—twice as the “bread of life” and once as the “living bread which came down from heaven.”

What does it matter whether or not we are aware of the origin of this living bread?

It matters because God wants us to be aware of our dependence upon God, as our heavenly source who is above this world, not simply part of it. “Our Father, who art in heaven,” we pray, “give us this day our daily bread.” Unless we see our earthly life as one end of a continual communication between heaven and earth, we do not see it in proper perspective. Our life cannot be sustained by anything less than bread which comes down from heaven. If we do not include heavenly nourishment in our daily schedule, we are going to starve spiritually.

Jesus has bread for us that came down from heaven. What is this bread? Jesus says, “It is me.” Here we arrive at the apparent absurdity that scandalized Jesus’ enemies and upset many of his own disciples. Later in this same chapter it says, “the Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’”

It’s a fair question. How can Jesus be bread? But Jesus says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless” (John 6:63; 3:6).

Jesus and the crowd use the same words but with very different meanings, which is John's literary technique of misunderstand. Here in chapter 6 the crowd just doesn't get it. Of course, in this Gospel, those closest to Jesus don't get it either. The crowds don't get Jesus.

They didn't get it when Jesus talked about the temple. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body (2:19-21). Nicodemus didn't get it when Jesus talked about "new birth" or being born again in the third chapter, the Samaritan woman at the well didn't get it about Jesus offering her water where she would not have to come back to the well for more in chapter 4.

The crowd hears Jesus speak of "bread" and they immediately think about breakfast, lunch and dinner. Jesus just some 10 verses before feeds the multitudes and they attempt to make him king. They just don't get it. The crowd looks for Jesus and Jesus responds, "You look for me because you don't know who I am" (v.26).

Jesus explicitly tells us three times (verses 51-56) that we are to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Our partaking of this sacrifice is expressed in a very physical manner in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which we will celebrate today. In receiving this bread and this cup we are in contact with Jesus' historical, physical act of dying for us on the cross—that is the physical expression of God's love for us. It becomes a real part of our lives, and not just a symbolic idea that we grasp intellectually. That is what we mean when we talk about the "real presence" of Christ in the Sacrament.

When we partake Jesus as the Bread of Life, there are four main effects that we experience.

First, our hunger is satisfied. Jesus says, "whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty (John 6:35). The prophet Joel says, "You shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord our God" (Joel 2:26).

Second, our spiritual life is sustained as we partake Jesus as the Bread of Life. Jesus gives us life like the sun gives life to green plants. But the plants need more than just the light from the sun's rays, they also need food, in the form of various essential nutrients that they receive from the air and the soil (nitrogen, phosphorus, etc.). In the same way we receive from Jesus the energy that sustains life and the spiritual food that supports life.

Third, we grow spiritually. Colossians 2:19 speaks of Christ, "from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God."

And finally, we stay on course toward our destination "at the last day" (A phrase used 4 times by Jesus in this dialogue). "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day" (John 6:54). The place where the living bread originates becomes the final destination of those who make it part of their regular diet.

Jesus invites us all to COME—come to the banquet that he has prepared for us. In coming, we move to a point of spiritual involvement with Jesus where we give all our attention to him.

As we come, we must TRUST. We should prepare to receive what Jesus offers us with simple acceptance and trust, even if that runs contradictory to everything we are taught to expect in the world.

If we come and trust, Jesus then says, TAKE, EAT . . . TAKE, DRINK

Come, trust, take and eat, drink. It is up to us to make a decision to act on those words, and carry it out.

Sources:

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The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.