

Jesus is Not Our Waiter
A Sermon for Wednesday, March 22, 2017
John 6:24-35
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

Jesus had just miraculously fed 5,000 people. This was what the Gospel of John calls a sign. It was as if God had stuck a big post in the ground and nailed a big, wooden arrow to it, and painted in beautiful, bold, bright letters: “I sent Jesus.” And then God had placed the sign in the path of 5,000 people so that they would look at it and say “yes, this Jesus really is from God. Let’s follow where the sign points and see where this journey takes us.”

But when those crowds of people track Jesus down, Jesus says, “you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” It’s as if Jesus is saying, “You have entirely missed what this is about. You saw the sign, and you said, ‘that’s a really nice sign. Good color scheme. Beautifully written.’ But you forgot that the purpose of a sign is to point you to something, or in this case to someone, beyond itself.”

In other words, Jesus is saying to them graciously, but bluntly, “You don’t care about who I am or what my work is. You just liked having all the bread you wanted.” Ouch.

Jesus had invited all of these people over to dinner, and they’re so happy with the food that they don’t spend any time with the host. They ignore him. They treat the host like a waiter. They came to the party not at all because of who the host is, but because of what the host can do for them.

Of course Jesus cares deeply about their problems. Jesus is constantly helping people who are in distress-- people who are facing hunger, sickness, death, or guilt. And the crowds see the wonderful things that Jesus does, and they say, "I want some of that for *myself*."

But what Jesus wants them to recognize is that he is so much more than the solution to their problems. **Jesus is more than the solution to *our* problems.**

How often are we guilty of following Jesus because of what he does *for* us rather than who he *is* for us? Remember when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush? God says "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be." We don't get to decide who God is. God gets to decide who God is. We only get to decide whether to love God or reject God. God did not have to be "Provider" to the Israelites. But that's who God is. God doesn't have to be loving, but God is Love. That's who Jesus reveals God to be. We have a good, good God.

In our worship, we offer God our praise and thanksgiving. Sometimes, we use those words interchangeably, but most of the time they actually mean something different. Thanksgiving is-- well-- being thankful! It's being thankful for what Christ does for us. If Jesus feeds us, we should offer God our thanksgiving. If we woke up this morning, we should thank God.

Praise, on the other hand, is what we offer to God simply because of who God is. I tell my 4-year-old boy that I'll love him whether or not he does the things I ask him to do, simply because he's my boy. In the same

way, when we give God praise, we say, “God I love you for who you are, whether or not you do the things I ask you to do.”

God knows that we have problems. And God cares deeply about them and wants us to lift them up in prayer. But God knows that what we need the most in life-- what we need *for* life-- is ultimately not food, or money, or *anything* in particular, but Jesus himself. As Scottish writer George MacDonald says, “*Hunger* may drive the runaway child [to go] home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his mother more than his dinner.”

Jesus may or may not give us the food we want. But if we have Jesus, we have the food that we *need*, because Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” That is who Jesus *is*. He *is* the bread of life. He is God’s provision for us-- just as God sent manna to the Israelites in the wilderness to sustain them on their journey, God sends Jesus to us. Before we thank God for what Jesus does for us, can we just praise God who Jesus *is* for us? Jesus is God with us. God for us. God beside us. God among us.

Once we understand who Jesus *is* for us, then we can understand what Jesus *does* for us. As the bread of life, Jesus is the one who satisfies the hunger inside every human being-- that restlessness that always has us unhappy with some portion of our circumstances, and that always keeps us looking to the next thing. That hunger that the world is always trying to satisfy with bigger and bigger displays of money, sex, or power. But those things never seem to get around to delivering on the fulfillment they promise. They always have us saying, “I need more.” The hunger

not only remains, but it deepens-- and not in a good way. Jesus satisfies that hunger. And he does it not by giving us more stuff, or even by fixing our problems-- he simply gives himself. And he does that knowing that he, in fact, is exactly who we need.

Lent is a time to focus ourselves on that reality. We fast because food is not our master, Jesus is. We focus on prayer because we need God's help, of course-- but really we pray because need God. We read scripture because by the Holy Spirit, Jesus meets us in it. We celebrate Holy Communion-- although unfortunately not tonight-- because in it, in the most obvious way possible, Jesus gives himself to us there, and there we see Jesus as the bread of life.

We need the wonderful things that Jesus does in our lives. Let's pray for them. Let's hope for them. Let's expect them. But let's make sure to move past the signs, to the wonderful reality that they point to-- the person of Jesus Christ, and the incredible greatness of our God.

And so let's pray, "Lord, give us this bread always." Amen.