

Jim Gill

August 12, 2018

“Bread of Life 2”

2 Samuel 18:1-18

John 6:35; 41-51 Ephesians 4:25-5:2

INTRODUCTION TO 2 SAMUEL

On our vacation Anne and I visited some Civil War battlegrounds. Civil War ISN'T! If it is WAR, it is anything but CIVIL. This is true of every war that has ever been fought with that designation, from our own a century-and-a-half ago, (that in some ways we are still fighting—tonight in Charlottesville we hope will not be a repeat of last year.) to some of the horrific conflicts we see on the news from the Middle East. War between brothers is anything but civil and It has been going on since Cain killed Abel.

Our lesson from 2 Samuel tells the story of Israel's ancient war between family members. Absalom was the child of a union between King David with the princess of a neighboring city-state, no doubt to consummate a political alliance, as was the practice of the day.

David had compassion for his son Absalom. But Absalom had none for his father. The tale of Absalom, up in arms against his father, is one of the darkest portraits of evil displayed in the gallery of biblical bad guys. Absalom had maneuvered himself into a position of power—a position allowing him to usurp, for a time, the crown of David. Absalom loved power more than he loved his own father.

Last time I shared about David's sin with Bathsheba and one of the consequences of that sin--the death of the first child of that union. This morning we read about the death of another of David's sons, one who had years earlier killed another of David's sons. Hear the word of the Lord from 2 Samuel 18:1-18.

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 6:35; 41-51

Summer is a time for reruns. When I see that my DVR has recorded a show and punch the INFO button it either says NEW or REPEAT. Summer is also a time for Sequels. This summer Anne and I saw Incredibles 2. It's been 14 years since the first one. That's a long time coming sequel.

This week we continue looking at Jesus discourse about his claim to be the Bread of Life. This month you may feel like we're in summer reruns or sequels, because in this 6th chapter of John Jesus repeats himself over and over in order to get his point across that he is the Bread of life. Hear the word of God from the gospel of our Lord, John 6:35, 41-51

Let's pray. Dear Lord, We thank you for daily bread and for eternal bread, for sending your Son to be the Bread of life for us. Lord, thank you for this, your word. Open our eyes to see, our minds to understand, and our hearts to receive

so that we may respond to this your word through the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Can you imagine Olive Garden without Breadsticks or sausage gravy without biscuits? You can't have a BLT without the toast. You can't have a sub sandwich without a Hoagie roll. . A peanut butter and jelly sandwich without bread would be a sticky mess. An Egg McMuffin without the muffin would just be an egg and Panera Bread would just be Panera. The only guys who eat hot dogs or hamburgers without the bun are on the Adkins diet. Are there people still on Adkins?

Bread is a big part of our everyday life. In this passage, Jesus continues to call Himself the Bread of Life, Bread from Heaven. In so doing, He tells us that just as we need the daily bread for our physical bodies, we also need daily "Bread from Heaven" for our spiritual lives.

Preaching on this text, one pastor quips: You can get away with murder if you are just a little vague. If you make a statement or a promise and you are just vague enough, you leave yourself an out. We have come to expect this kind of thing from politicians. A politician promises to "address" an issue. We think the politician will do something about the problem when in reality all they intend to do is make mention of it in a speech. After all, another word for a speech is an address.

"If you can get away with murder by being vague, you can also get murdered by being too precise. If you say exactly what you mean, people will hold you to your words. Your precision gives them a standard by which to judge you and your actions. This is exactly what is happening here with Jesus. He has been precise. The crowds, who just the day before wanted to force kingship upon him now are confused, grumbling at his words, and questioning his authority.

In one way, what Jesus says is plain: Bread is something we eat. It nourishes us. It sustains us and makes us grow. That's who Jesus is, God come to us to nourish us, to sustain us, and to make us grow."1

Some thought Jesus to be a prophet. Prophets brought signs and worked wonders. Considering some of the miracles Jesus performed like walking on water, changing the water into wine, raising people from the dead, feeding thousands from one lunch you would think that that alone would have convinced the people that he was the one they had been awaiting. But it was not enough. They wanted more.

That is why God is revealed through much more than signs and wonders alone. They are never enough. To be sure Jesus performed signs and wonders, but that was not his purpose in coming. The signs pointed to who he was. They were his I.D. not his M.O.

One of my favorite humorists is Stephen Wright. He delivers his take on life with dead pan seriousness. One of my favorite lines of his goes like this. "I bought a life size map of the world. One mile equals one mile.

The map is not the road. It is a piece of paper that points out the road, points out the way to go to get to where we want to go. In that sense, the signs Jesus did, and that people asked for more of... were not the way. They pointed to the one who was THE Way.

Some people encountered Jesus and saw nothing special. Others were wowed by his miracles, but once Jesus starts talking, telling them that the source of his miracles is God, the people stopped listening and started arguing.

Pastor John Kramp reports that his grandmother had a unique way of ending arguments with her spouse. When Grandma got tired of listening to her husband, she would just turn off her hearing aid. As he said, "Grandmother refused to hear anything she didn't want to hear."

The people around Jesus wanted more signs but they didn't want to hear what the signs meant. They didn't want to hear that Jesus was God in the flesh. They didn't want to hear that he was the true bread of life and the way to salvation and eternal life. They didn't want to hear that He was the Bread FROM heaven and that he came FROM Heaven and that He was intimately connected with their Heavenly Father and that He was the Way to salvation from their Heavenly Father.

"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" they asked. We know his earthly father. What is all this talk about THE Father and Everlasting life? "How can he now say, "'I came down FROM heaven'?" We're working on getting TO Heaven but he says he came FROM Heaven?

Notice, Jesus wasn't just claiming he saw a vision of heaven. Many respected prophets of old claimed that. No, Jesus was saying that he had actually come down from heaven, and was, therefore, qualified to speak about it. That's the part that was and for some still IS difficult to swallow much less follow.

Jesus changes our ideas of God. After the disciples had been with Jesus and heard him teach, then saw him die and on the third day rise from the dead, they could never again think of God in the same way.

Why would the God of power and might limit himself with human flesh? How could the awesome and eternal I AM be confined to a weak and vulnerable body?

The people Jesus was speaking to lived hard lives of constant physical labor. They dreamed of being released from the confines of the human body. Why would God dignify the body by being confined to one?

Why did Jesus do it? He did it to save us. In order to save us from this "body of death," God took on the same limited body we have. He knows our aches and pains and weaknesses. He is sympathetic to our struggles. In Jesus, we see how much God loves us and how far God would go to communicate that love.

There is joy and fulfillment in having a relationship with God. We were made to know God and to be filled with God's glory. Anything less than that relationship leaves us restless, discontent, empty, and anxious. Jesus knew that every human heart is filled with the longing for communion with God. Everyone who truly wants to know God will come to Jesus. He is the full revelation of who God is and what God desires.

To truly know God, God's Spirit must live in us. It is not enough to know that Jesus is Lord. To truly know him, we must take him into our own lives and let his Holy Spirit transform us from the inside out. Then we find new energy, new purpose, and new power. This is the promise of abundant life now and eternal life later.

The author Ron Lee Dunn tells the story of two altar boys. One was born in 1892 in Eastern Europe. The other was born just three years later in a small town in Illinois. Though they lived very separate lives in very different parts of the world, these two altar boys had almost identical experiences. Each boy was given the opportunity to assist his parish priest in the service of communion. While handling the communion cup, they both accidentally spilled some of the wine on the carpet by the altar. There the similarity in their story ends.

The priest in the Eastern European church, seeing the purple stain, slapped the altar boy across the face and shouted, "Clumsy oaf! Leave the altar." The little boy grew up to become an atheist and a communist. His name was Marshall Josip Tito - dictator of Yugoslavia for 37 years.

The priest in the church in Illinois upon seeing the stain near the altar, knelt down beside the boy and looked him tenderly in the eyes and said, "It's alright son. You'll do better next time. You'll be a fine priest for God someday." That little boy grew up to become the much-loved Bishop Fulton J. Sheen.**2**

There is the gospel! We are repelled by wrath and condemnation, but we are drawn by love. God draws us by love. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws them."

If David's son Absalom embodied everything that was wrong in humanity, Jesus, God's son embodied everything that was right. Jesus was the embodiment of

what Paul wrote to the Ephesians. Jesus never looked down on anyone, never called anyone a sinner. Jesus welcomed all into his family. He was never exclusive, always inclusive. He was a friend like no other. To be in his presence was to be in the presence of love, healing and hope. As a friend, he lay down his life for those he loved.

I love the prayer of the little girl: "God make the bad people good, and make the good people nice." There are too many religious people who are not very nice. Jesus, our model, stood for all the right things, but it was clear that he loved people, even people who were considered bad. His goal was not condemnation, but redemption. Even when he was saying hard things, he was still tenderhearted, and his basic kindness showed through.

Could the key to life really be that simple: that God loves us, so we can love one another? God is kind to us, so we can be kind to one another? Could it be that the most important things we do each day are to receive God's kindness and then to pass it on to others--to every person we meet in everything we do? That is our challenge for the day. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice. Replace them with kindness, compassion and forgiveness.

That is the recipe. Those are the ingredients. Taking those attitudes into our lives and acting on them is what nourishes our spirits. In the words of this year's motto for the Houston Astros we should "never settle for Panera Bread. To truly grow spiritually we need the king of nourishment that only comes from the Bread of Life.

Let's pray. Bread of heaven, feed us. Word of truth, teach us. Author of life, fit us for eternity amid our days on this earth, that our deeds may honor you. Help us to be kind and tenderhearted to one another and to forgive one another as in Christ You have forgiven us. We pray that we would speak to more than ourselves about the things we see that are not good. We pray that we would speak to more than ourselves about what we see that is good. May we heed the signs around us. May we become signs that point the way for others to come to the one who is the Way the Truth and the Life.

1. **The Real Thing**, by Beth Quick
2. **David G. Mullen**, by The Barge, Not the Tugboat!

