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“The Bread of Life”

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a John 6:22-35 Ephesians 4:1-16

INTRODUCTION TO 2 Samuel 11:26-12:1a

God is outraged by David’s adultery with Bathsheba and his arranging the killing of her husband so he could take Bathsheba as his wife. So Nathan the prophet comes to tell David a story about something near and dear to David’s heart. Nathan uses an image that reminds David of his life as a young shepherd. Hear the word of God from 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 6:24-35

I Otto Frederick Rohwedder of Davenport, Iowa invented the first loaf-at-a-time bread-slicing machine. Since then, the phrase "the greatest thing since sliced bread" has become a commonly used as a way of praising an invention or development. The popular use of the phrase comes from the 1930’s ad campaign for Wonder Bread, the first mass-marketer of sliced bread as a product. The wonder wasn’t that the bread itself was wonderful. It was a wonder that it came already sliced.

Jesus did a Wonder WITH bread. This morning we read of him following the dramatic miracle of feeding 5,000 with 5 loaves by talking to a crowd of people who were trying to gain a greater understanding of who he was by saying “I Am the bread.....of LIFE.” Hear the word of the Lord from John 6:24-35

Let’s pray. Dear Lord, you are the source of all good gifts. You are the creator of all good things. We thank you for daily bread and for sending your Jesus 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 we may respond to this your word through the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

With 28 Olympic medals, Michael Phelps is the G.O.A.T. the greatest Olympian of all time. When it comes to Olympians, he IS the greatest thing since sliced bread. However, this week one of his records was beaten by Clark Kent. No, not Superman, though the 10-year-old **Clark Kent Apuada** is getting some comparisons after breaking a 23-year-old meet record set by Phelps.

Clark swims for the Monterey County Aquatic Team, which competed at the Far West International Championship in California. During last weekend, Clark won the 100-meter butterfly in 1:09:38, more than a second faster than what Phelps set at the championship in 1995. Clark, has only been swimming competitively for four years, CNN reported. Clark is the latest ... greatest thing since sliced bread.

Edward F. Markquart described his recent trip to the grocery store like this. "I recently visited our grocery store and discovered that the row of bread in our grocery store is seven shelves high and forty-five feet long. This forty-five foot row of bread is divided as follows...At the far right, are all the very sweet "breads" such as Ding Dongs, Twinkies, Zingers, Brownies, and Powered Puffies. The next set of breads is the bagels and I find that bagels come in many different flavors and tastes. The next set of breads is the buns. These are numerous hot dog buns and hamburger buns. Next came the rolls. There were hard rolls, French rolls, sour dough rolls and a host of other rolls that often appear at our dinner table when my wife is serving a more formal dinner. Then, after thirty feet of these breads, come the actual loaves of bread. I discovered that there were twelve grain breads, nine grain breads, eight grain breads, and the numbers of grains slowly declined until I got to the Wonder Bread which must have had no grains in it at all. ...1

Just think for a moment how so many significant theological events in the Bible revolve around the subject of bread.

1. The most important event in the Old Testament of course, was the Exodus of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. But what caused the Hebrews to be in Egypt in the first place? It was a lack of bread.

The wheat crop had failed due to drought, and Jacob was forced to send his sons to Egypt to buy grain because there was a surplus in storage there. Why was there a surplus in storage in Egypt? Because years earlier Joseph's brothers became jealous of him and sold him into slavery. But because Joseph was in enslaved in Egypt, he was in the wrong place at the right time to be able to interpret Pharaoh's dream about the upcoming drought.... so that grain would be stored..... so that Joseph could be the vehicle through which the entire nation of Israel would be saved...and subsequently enslaved and subsequently delivered by Moses. It was bread, or the lack of it, that initiated that whole chain of events.

2.Later, when the Jews were on their way to the Promised Land and they were facing starvation in the bleak wilderness, God rained down bread from heaven, as it was called, in the form of manna. The Hebrew word "manna" means "What is it?"

3.The town that was the birthplace of King David which was prophesied to be the birthplace of the Messiah was Bethlehem, which in Hebrew means, "House of Bread." Jesus was born in (singing) O Little Town of House of Bread

4. What happened immediately after Jesus was baptized? He was "led" by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After 40 days of not eating, as the hot sun blazed down upon him, he looked at the round white rocks, and we are told that they took on the appearance of loaves of bread. Satan tempted

Jesus to make bread out of rocks to curb his own hunger. But Jesus resisted that temptation saying, "Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

5. One day Jesus was praying by the roadside when the disciples walked up and saw him. They were so impressed by the sincerity of his prayer that they implored him: Master, teach us how to pray. It was in the midst of the Master's prayer that he reminds us of the importance of the bread to life. He taught them to ask, "Give us this day our daily bread."

In this morning's passage folks from the crowd that ate their fill the day before are arguing that that he merely fed 5000whereas Moses had fed a nation. It's like they're saying, "Jesus, yesterday you gave us daily bread but today is a new day. You fed us for one day but Moses did it for 40 years. One day down and 39 years and 364 more to go!)

They pointed out that when the Israelites were in the wilderness Moses was able to bring bread from heaven. Since that time there had been a strong rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came he, too, would bring manna from heaven. The sending of Manna for 40 years in the wilderness had been the supernatural demonstration of God's power through Moses, and surely, they reasoned, the Messiah could surpass that. Multiplying bread from the earth was one thing. They wanted him to produce bread from heaven.

When you think about Jesus' miracles compared to Moses' miracles, some of them do pale by comparison. Moses had more drama: frogs, snakes, insects, river turned to blood, the angel of death, parting the Red Sea. Moses' miracles caused havoc with Israel's enemies. The only havoc wreaked by Jesus' miracles was with Israel's leaders--the religious establishment.

Jesus answers these expectations by saying that they had misinterpreted the events that took place through Moses.

First of all, he reminded them that the bread in the wilderness had not come from Moses but from God. Moses was the facilitator, but not the originator.

Secondly, they failed to see that the real bread from heaven was not manna at all. Manna was only meant to be a symbol of the true bread from heaven. The real bread from heaven comes down and feeds not only man's physical needs but also his spiritual hunger as well. It was at this point, and don't miss the significance of this, Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst." To satisfy your hunger for heaven you must draw your sustenance from the bread of heaven.

The crowd said to Jesus, "Well then, give us this bread from heaven." But Jesus takes the image farther. He says, "I AM the bread from heaven. As bread from

the earth nourishes us physically, so Jesus, the Bread of Life, nourishes us spiritually.

Those of us who are parents try to provide for our children all the physical needs that they could have. Some today have lamented that we are raising a generation that was never spanked and always got a trophy for just showing up. We feed them. We clothe them. We give them a roof over their heads. But the older they get the more they discover that their needs go so much deeper than those physical needs. They want to be loved. They want to play...yes, but eventually, playing fails to satisfy their hunger for meaning. They discover that there's more to life than bread. They hunger after new experiences. In short, they desire more than mere existence... more than bread alone. They want bread that nurtures their soul, their need to be loved and encouraged.

Yesterday before I came to church for the last hour of the Prayer Vigil I was at Sterling High School from 10-11 for the Shots for Tots. My assignment was to try to ease the anxiety of some of the tots waiting in line to get their shots. I lent some of them my red guitar pick and let them strum the guitar to the ABC song and to Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, which strangely enough sound like the same tune. Some of the happiest children who showed no fear at all were the most screamed the loudest when it came to their shots. Some of the soberest children didn't even flinch. Almost all of them sat in one of their parent's laps being hugged and encouraged and comforted as they dealt with the dread of pain.

It made me think back to the time that I had to get my immunizations. My mom's best friend was a nurse and she came to our house. When I heard the word shot I crawled and hid under our trundle bed. When my parents pulled me out and the deed was done I was reported to have said, 'You shot my butt!!' But she wasn't through. Then I said, "You shot my other butt." Had I been sitting in a lap I might have been safe.

I want to close with the story of Steven Morris. He was a special needs child in Mrs. Bernaducci's class. Steven was blind. His handicap negatively impacted his self-esteem. However, over a period of time, the teacher realized that Steven had exceptional hearing.

One day she put the class mascot, a mouse, into the trash can. The scratching noise created a minor panic until Steven located the mouse. Mrs. Bernaducci exclaimed: "Steven, you are truly a wonder."

The nickname caught on. The next year, full of a sense of his own value he began playing the piano...all because of Mrs. Bernaducci's faith and encouragement. little Stevie 'Wonder' would go on to influence and change American music 2

Mrs. Benaducci gave us Stevie Wonder. I Otto Frederick Rohwedder of Davenport, Iowa with his slicing machine gave us Wonder Bread. Jesus took bread and instituted a wonder, a sacrament a visible outward sign of an inward grace when he broke bread and said this is my body, broken for you....do this in remembrance of me.

Jesus is with us at the grocery stores of our lives as we search the 45 feet of 7 shelves high for bread. Jesus was with those gathered at Shots for Tots. He is with us in this sanctuary. Jesus calls us to be people of infinite love, gentle love, and compassionate love for everyone. The bread of life and energy of love needs to be living inside of all of us as we visit all those public places in our lives each day. These are times that try our souls. These are the times that cause stress and uncertainty. These are times when we not only need to give but we need to receive a word of encouragement. And that's what we get when we come to this table. to witness the sharing of a cup and the breaking of bread ...and we WONDER. .

Michael Phelps was a boy wonder. He got his medals and trophies for much more than just showing up. He showed off. He showed off his skills, his talent, his dedication, his hard work, his love of the sport. Ten year old Clark Kent Apuada is coming after those records. He is the next boy wonder.

Jesus, the Bread of Life, laid down his life on an Old Rugged Cross which we cherish till OUR trophies at last WE lay down. Jesus ultimately provides a quality of life--a way to get beyond ourselves and mere existence and experience life ABUNDANTLY made possible because Jesus IS the Bread of LIFE.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, we ask you for daily bread and you provide. This morning we ask for Living Bread and you provide. In these earthly bodies we crave a taste of the heaven that is to come. This is the food that endures forever. For Jesus Christ, we give you thanks and praise, now and for all eternity.

Lord, turn us from complaints about what we do not have to thanksgiving for the many good things we do have. Turn us from apathy towards others who do not have what we have and stir us to share the daily bread and the Bread of life with them! All praise be to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Edward F. Markquart
2. Billy D. Strayhorn, Bread of Heaven