

# **“The Bread that Keeps on Feeding”**

**John 6: 24-35**

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## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

I was a freshman in college sitting in my fraternity room, studying. I was a good little student.

Two guys (or was it three?) knocked at the door. Two of the brothers, and one of their friends who hung around a lot. They wanted to talk with me about Jesus.

They drew a simple picture that basically said, if someone did not accept Jesus as their personal Lord and savior, they were going to fall into this abyss, out of which I could not get, forever. They were very concerned about me.

I said, it's all good. I've got it covered. I went through confirmation. I joined the church. I'm a Presbyterian. They were not satisfied. They went on at great length to say, apparently, if I did not say the formula, I was not saved. Did I accept Jesus as my personal, Lord and savior?

Apparently, they were not going to leave until I said their ritual incantation. It did not violate my conscience, so I said sure, Personal. Lord. Savior. At that point, they got real happy, gave each other knowing looks, smiled big smiles, and told me the angels were dancing in heaven.

They left, and I got to get back to my homework. Important lesson: There are some people that are good hearted, well meaning, sincere, but who end up reducing our faith to something simplistic.

I tell that story, not to put down my friends from long ago, But to say, I think I have spent a lot of my faith journey, Coming to see again and again, how I myself have had a strong tendency To reduce the Bible, faith, and Jesus, into a simplistic platitude, truism, reductionism.

Faith is something other. I think that is why I struggled for so long with the gospel of John. I was like the disciples, the followers of Jesus, who saw one impressive manifestation of Jesus' power, and wanted to reduce the whole of faith into that one micro-portion.

To wit, Jesus is about a miracle. If you just believe in the miracle, then you get it. If you just believe he fed the 5000, then you understand what Jesus is about. Bread. Multiplication. I get fed. End of story.

Jesus, in fact, mocks this kind of faith. Jesus is the miracle worker. End of story.

Gospel of John: The Maverick Gospel is different from the other 3. It tells the story in a very different way. Leaves whole sections out. Expands other sections and includes stories written nowhere else. Language: poetry.

Bruce Malina, Creighton University, says that the Gospel of John Is insider language, like prisoners speaking in front of the guards. They don't want the guard to understand, so they speak in the poetry of Rap. Rapmaster John. The images in John cascade over the imagination.

In the beginning was the Word, the word was the life, The Life was the Light,  
The Light of the world. The darkness don't get it.

It is full of oppositions and contrasts. It is provocative poetry. Ambiguous, by intent (Kysar, p. 5) Secret code that needs a key: What do you mean, Jesus? Jesus answers. But Jesus' answers are not entirely helpful because we want to keep the world "as it is." We keep on trying to close things down. Jesus keeps opening things up. Jesus invades our consciousness.

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, the life." But we say: "Jesus is the way." We close it down. Jesus opens it up: Jesus says: I am the water of life. I am the vine, you are the branches. I am the light of the world. You must be born again.

You can hear the prisoners laughing as the guards have no idea what they are rapping about. This poetic language is there to do more than stretch our minds. It is there to blow our little boxed in world apart.

A psychologist did an experiment exploring creative thinking. The researcher put people literally inside a box. Then it put some other people outside the box. They were asked both to come up with creative solutions to a problem. The results revealed that those outside the box were more creative in their solutions. Jesus comes to do more than take us outside the box. Jesus blows the boxes apart.

In the prologue to the gospel of John, the first chapter: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Literally, the Greek says, "the word put up a camp/ tented among us."

The Logos/the Word of God "is on a journey and camps out in this world for a time as part of [the] itinerary." (Kysar, p. 45).

Kysar says, these are claims for the cosmic existence of Jesus, put in terms that are poetic and profound. What does Jesus do? Jesus helps us to perceive reality. To perceive reality through different lenses, through different eyes.

For example: Jesus and the disciples are surrounded by 5,000 people who are unprepared for the wilderness. How would other people see the 5000? Through the eyes of fear, the 5000 people on edge are a danger. They may get out of control. We better get tough with the crowd. Through the eyes of greed, they are an opportunity to make money. They are vulnerable. Maybe we can convince them to buy something. Seeing the crowd through cash-register eyes.

Through the eyes of the disciples, they are a problem, a drain on scarce resources. That needs to be sent away. Through the eyes of Jesus: they are an opportunity for sharing. A possibility for the miracle of generosity. Jesus sees the possibility for feeding every one of them.

Then the disciples want to commodify the miracle. Jesus says: You don't get it. You've reduced it again. I am the bread that keeps on feeding. Jesus is the one who reveals the possibilities for feeding the world.

A world that is:  
Hungry for hope.  
Hungry for love.  
Hungry for community.  
Hungry for peace.  
Hungry to be heard, paid attention to, valued.  
Hungry for the transcendent love of God.

To all these hungers, Jesus turns to the disciples and says: You are part of me, I am part of you. Through me, you can feed every one of those hungers. I am the vine, you are the branches. Stay connected to me: you produce the food that feeds the wine of celebration.

Jesus is an experience. When we experience him, it changes us. We see differently. We feel differently. We have a different stance toward the world. The meaning of life is not simple, and not easily absorbed. The language of Jesus is there to entice us to learn more. To wrestle with the problems.

Dialectic. A dialogue of learning and discerning, experimenting and experiencing.

Faith is not something someone has. Faith is something someone does. It is not a state of being. It is a way of existing. A continuing dynamic. A gift that we keep receiving again and again. A gift that we keep embodying again and again.

Jesus is the Revealer. What he reveals is the mystery of God. The mystery of the love of God that comes to us again and again, and again. That feeds us all. And feeds us again, and again, and again.

Amen.