

John 6:24-35 Spiritual Food
Ephesians 4:1-16
August 1, 2021

Breaking bread is a universal metaphor of the sharing of food. Nowadays, with issues about yeast allergies and the whole gluten phenomenon, it is possible to share food without consuming bread. Ironically, people can “break bread” without breaking actual bread.

Last week, the main text from the Gospel of St. John was the Feeding of the Multitude on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Afterwards, Jesus had a private conversation with his followers and further explained the meaning of the metaphor. Not only does bread stand for food in general, but the bread that fed the multitude stands for the kind of nourishment that doesn't really involve physical food at all, because it is spiritual.

“Honestly, you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you had your fill (which is an interesting thing to say) . . . Do not look for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.”

Eating is interminable, it has no end. It is a good thing that most people like to eat, although sometimes they don't like so much the food that is best for them, because we spend a great deal of time and energy eating, or preparing to eat, or shopping to procure the food to eat, or working to earn the money to pay for

the food. The provision of food takes up an entire sector of the world's economy. One can only live a short time without food. Not only does the nourishment from the food not last, but we don't last long either.

All of this conversation was very difficult for the people who took part in it, some of whom were overly literalistic in their understanding of “bread.” Even now, 2,000 years later, Christians still argue about the bread of the Eucharist, the sacred meal. Is it real or symbolic, as if the two are opposites? What is meant by “real presence” as opposed to Transubstantiation? Does the bread actually turn into the human flesh of Jesus?

They asked him what they had to do, even though he had just told them that it would be given to them. Then they asked for a sign - of all things - even though he had just given them two signs, Feeding the Multitude and Walking on the Water. Finally he said, “I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

It is made more clear in the subsequent conversation that he is not talking about physical food, about physical things at all, but spiritual things. Have you ever heard someone say, “there is a natural explanation for everything?” Perhaps you have believed that yourself?

Science is in the business of asking after natural explanations and there are millions of questions that can be answered that way, and we should listen. But it is clear from the start some things resist. Not everything has a natural or scientific answer. Faith doesn't.

The best window in to the world of the faith is relationships, and the list is long of the kind of things people have been known to have felt and done in the context of relationships that defy scientific explanation, both positive and negative. Faith is at the top of the list.

On the negative side, add; hate, greed, fear, irresponsibility, dishonor, deceit, "party spirit". . . things like that. On the positive side; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control, to use one of Paul's lists. Or one could just do the opposites; responsibility, honor, honesty, integrity, things like that.

The realities are only known in the context of relationships and when Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life," he means to invite us into a relationship, not only with himself, but with God. It is a revolutionary idea, not to be spoken of lightly. The relationship of which Jesus speaks nourishes our souls, our lives, like food does our bodies. From the point of view of science, it is a mystery.

Of all the human pursuits we know, the pursuit of wealth and/or power, of excellence, whether it be in

athletics, like in the olympics which are underway presently, or in some other field, such as Biology or Epidemiology, the conclusion we must draw is that they *fail to satisfy*. When one is finished, one still needs more. Every answer is accompanied by a new set of questions. Hunger is followed by hunger, and thirst by thirst.

Even human relations often fail to deliver on their promises. We live in a time when there are many assaults on community, the trends are alienating, not so with faith. Relationships are a crucial part of health, and still offer the best way to understand God: that God personal, with whom one *can have* a relationship; that God is benevolent and kind, merciful and just, and that if being a human being is problematic, not just in the sense that life comes with problems, but that life itself *is a problem*, then we are met with the answer that God has taken responsibility and solved it, and that is our spiritual nourishment.

The pursuit of this relationship with God in faith sustains, and fulfills, never leaving one empty. With these ideas In mind:

The breaking of bread is a universal metaphor of the sharing of food. The bread that fed the multitude stands for this spiritual nourishment. Just something to consider as we share the sacred meal.

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