

October 4, 2009  
 First Baptist Vancouver

Text: John 6:22-40  
 Title: **“I AM the Bread of Life”**  
 [Series, “Who Is Jesus?”]

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Who is He?

Jesus.

The Man from Galilee.

The Carpenter, born and raised in the back-woods, despised village of Nazareth.

“Can anything good come from Nazareth?” someone asked.

“Come and see,” was the reply.

“Come and see” indeed!

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We say of First Baptist Church,

*“We are a community following Jesus in the city with a heart for the city.”*

Jesus.

Following Jesus.

A Person.

We are a community following a Person.

We are not a community following a program.

Nor are we a community following principles to live by.

Nor are we a community following a religion,  
 or spirituality or ideology.

We are a community following a Person.

OK, so Who is He? Who IS Jesus?

“I AM the Bread of Life,” He says.

“The Bread of Life.”

“I” – a Person – “I AM.”

“I AM the Bread of Life, the Living Bread.”

One of the most audacious claims anyone has ever made!

**“Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger,**

**And whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.**

**Eat this bread and you shall live forever.”**

If you have ever spent time in the fourth Gospel, in the Gospel according to John,

you know that this is not the first or only time He dares to use

those sacred words “I AM.”

It IS the first time He uses them with a predicate, with a noun.

But He had already spoken the “I AM.”

To a woman at a well in Samaria.

Who wanted to know where she should worship.

Who liked what she was hearing from Jesus about worship,

but who said she would wait until Messiah came.

To which Jesus said, “I AM, the One you is speaking to you.”

Not just, “I am Messiah for whom you are waiting.”

But “I AM ... the one you are seeking to worship.”

He would later say to religious authorities who were very upset with Him,

“Before Abraham came into existence, I AM.”

“Bread of Life” is the first “I AM” claim He makes with a noun attached.

He will go on to say:

“I AM the **Light of the world;**

whoever follows Me

will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.”

“I AM the **Good Shepherd:**

the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

“I AM the **Resurrection and the Life:**

whoever lives and believes in Me

shall live even if they die.”

“I AM the **Way, the Truth, the Life;**

no one comes to the Father but by Me.”

“I AM the **true Vine;**

you are the branches.

Keep on abiding in Me and I in you,

And you will bear much fruit.”

All audacious in there own way.

“I AM the Bread of Life.”

Hugely audacious!

And a strange way for a man to speak of himself.

Bread?

Maker of bread, ok.

Baker of bread, ok.

Giver of bread, ok.

But the bread?

A Person the bread itself?

“ I AM ... the bread.”

We cannot make it without bread.

Bread is absolutely necessary for human existence.

We can make it without most of what we have.

But we cannot make it without bread.

“I AM the Bread of Life.”

Life does not work without Me.

You cannot make it without Me.

I AM absolutely necessary for human existence.

You can make without most of what you have.

But you cannot make it without Me.

Again, hugely audacious!

You need Me as much as you need your next meal.

Indeed, you need Me more than you need you next meal.

I once heard Bruce Metzger of Princeton point out that

Jesus does not say, "I AM the cake of life."

He could say that ...  
for He is delicious in everyway.

But He does not say that because we can make it without cake.

Really! We can!

But we cannot make it without bread.

Cake is a luxury ... bread a necessity.

Had Jesus lived in Asia He might of said, "I AM the rice of life."

Had He lived in the north latitudes  
of Canada and Russia and Scandinavia, He might have said,

"I AM the potato of life."

I AM not a luxury.

I AM absolutely essential for human existence.

**No one ever made such a claim for himself.**

No one, except the God of Israel.

"Vancouver: you need Me more than your next meal."

You realize, do you not, that in making this **huge claim** about Himself

Jesus is paying us a **huge compliment**.

He is?

Yes.

For Jesus is saying that we are the earthly creatures

who can only be satisfied by heavenly food.

Jesus is saying that we are the creature whose hunger and thirst

can only be met by a Person,

by the great "I AM."

No earthly bread can meet the deepest longings and cravings of the human person.

None of the "stuff" we clamor to own and keep finally satisfies.

We are too gloriously constituted for "stuff" to fill us.

A fact made graphically clear in the wealthy parts of the world,  
in our part of the world,  
where we have all the "stuff" anyone could ever want  
and are still hungry.

*We are so gloriously constituted that only a Person  
can met the longings and craving of our souls.*

Our finite hearts

can only be satisfied with the infinite "I AM."

A huge compliment!

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Now, I suppose that Jesus could have made this claim –

"I AM the Bread of Life" –

any time, any where.

He could have said to any hungry, thirsty person any where, any time,

"I Am the Bread of Life ... come to Me and eat."

After preaching His Sermon on the Mount,  
 His exposition of the Kingdom Life,  
 for instance,  
 He could have said,  
 “In order to live this new way of life,  
 you will need sustenance;  
 I AM the sustenance,  
 I AM the Bread of Life.”

But He waited.

He waited to make the claim in just at just the right time, in just the right circumstance.

It is another example of His brilliance.

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SO, consider with me the context in which He choose to say “I AM the Bread of Life.”

### 1. Jesus makes claim in the context of a **miracle**.

In the context of a **massive** miracle.

The apostle John tells us that at one point in His ministry

“a great multitude” followed Jesus around the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

John seems to under-score the word “great.”

The multitude had heard and seen the mighty deeds He had been doing,  
 especially His healing of the sick.

As the day wore on, the “great multitude” became hungry.

All that Jesus and the disciples had at their disposal

was a little lunch brought by a little boy.

*A little lunch  
with five little barley loaves and five little fish.*

John seems to put the emphasis on “little” –

great multitude, little loaves of bread, and little fish.

“What are these for so many people?” ask the disciples.

Very good question!

The question we ask in our time.

What good are our little resources in light

of the great number of people in need?

“Have the people sit down,” says Jesus.

When they do, Jesus takes the **little** loaves and **little** fish,

gives thanks to His Father,

and begins distributing a lot more bread and fish!

The people, says John, ate,

quote “as much as they wanted” close quote.

5,000 men - plus their wives and children who were not tallied in the count.

Upwards of 10,000 people!

All eating “as much as they wanted,”

After all had eaten, the disciples picked up

twelve baskets of left-overs!



Last Monday morning Sharon and I were at our son's home in Vernon.

We had driven up there to meet his new son,

our new grandson, born the previous Tuesday.

Early in the morning,

I was sitting in their living room reading my Bible,  
when our four-year-old grand-daughter Jennifer  
came to sit in my lap.

“What are you doing Grampa?”

“I am reading the Bible.

Would you like me to read you a Bible story?” I asked.

“Nope, they are all boring.”

“Well listen to this one.”

And I told her the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

When I got to the part about Jesus taking

five little loaves and two little fish,

and how He kept giving more bread and more fish –

“more bread, more fish,

more bread, more fish,

more bread, more fish,”

she said, “That's not boring!

Are there more stories like that?”

A massive miracle.

The only one included by all four Gospel writers.

More massive than any healing miracle.

Not to minimize His healing deeds- not at all.

It is just that in healing Jesus is taking something that is broken

and making it work again.

He takes hold of eyes that are not working

and makes them see again.

Wonderful. And impressive.

He takes hold of ears that are not working

and makes them see again.

Wonderful. And impressive.

He takes hold of feet that are not working

and makes them move again.

Wonderful. And impressive.

But nothing like what He did in the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

He is taking something and making more of it.

Very quickly!

I cannot get my mind around it.

Think of the massive creativity it takes

to speed up the process of baking bread.

Think of the massive creativity it takes

to make more fish out of fish!

In that deed Jesus is demonstrating His ability to provide for human need.

He can take little, and out of little, provide much for many.

Jesus does buy the myth of scarcity that so often rules the world.

He knows another world, a world of abundance.

Which is why in the face of the many He can give thanks for the little.

When Jesus comes into the picture,

takes in hand what is there,

gives thanks,

and provides beyond what we can imagine.

THAT is the context in which He makes His first “I AM” claim.

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## 2. But there is more to the context.

The apostle John is careful to tell us that “Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.”

John 6, verse 4.

Some background.

Passover was, and still is, a time to remember.

A time to remember God’s great acts of salvation  
when God set His people free from slavery in Egypt.

During Passover the Jews remember **with sorrow**  
the bitter suffering of their ancestors.

During Passover the Jews remember **with humility**  
the sprinkled blood of the lambs,  
blood which protected them as the angel of death  
passed through Egypt,  
blood which caused judgment to “pass over” their homes.

During Passover the Jews remember **with awe**  
 the power of God;  
     how Yahweh the Living God parted the Red Sea  
         so the liberated people could “pass over” to the other side  
             and escape the pursuing armies of the Pharaoh.

And during Passover they remember **with gratitude**  
 the gracious gifts of God;  
     how Yahweh miraculously provided manna from heaven  
   and the flesh of quail,  
         so the people could survive in the Sinai desert.

AND Passover was, and still is, **a time to renew hope.**

In what sense?

The Moses who led Israel out of bondage to freedom;  
 the Moses who prayed for the manna from heaven;  
  
 promised that one day  
     God would send another leader, like himself,  
         to speak God’s life-giving word.

Deuteronomy 18:15 –  
 “The Lord your God will raise up for you  
     a prophet like me, from among you –  
         you shall listen to him.”

By the first century

there was the growing expectation  
     that during some Passover the Prophet-like-Moses would come.

AND – get this –

there was the growing expectation  
     that this Prophet-like-Moses would bring with him  
  
         the same miraculous deliverance  
             AND the same miraculous provision of God.

There was a saying in the 1<sup>st</sup> century:

*“As was the first redeemer, so was the final redeemer;  
as the first redeemer caused the manna to fall from heaven,  
even so shall the second redeemer cause manna to fall.”*

THAT is the context in which Jesus waits to make His “I AM the Bread of Life” claim!

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3. There is more to the context.

A challenge.

John tells us that the people were impressed!

And John tells us that the people “heard” the non-verbal claim  
Jesus was making in multiplying bread.

John 6, verse 14 –

*“When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed,  
they said,  
‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world’.”*

This is the Prophet Moses promised!

So impressed are they that they want to seize Jesus and make Him King.

Jesus would not have it.

He slipped away.

He was King alright ...  
but not their kind of king.

The next day the great multitude finds Jesus on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

He had “passed-over.”

Jesus say to them,

John 6, verse 26 –

“Truly, truly, I say to you,  
you seek Me not because you saw signs,  
but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”

In John’s Gospel “sign” is a technical word.

It refers to a “mighty act” which meaning in itself  
nevertheless points beyond itself to a larger reality.

The people saw the effect of the sign – 5,000 plus people are fed –  
but failed to see the sign itself.

The multiplication of bread points beyond the bread  
to a gift  
“that is never exhausted,  
a satisfaction that never passes”  
[Lesslie Newbigin, 78].

So Jesus exhorts the crowd.

John 6, verse 27 –

*“Do not work for the food which perishes,  
but for the food which endures to eternal life,  
which the Son of Man shall give to you...”*

Now, when Jesus mentions “work” it triggers in the religious mind “good works,”

works done to earn the blessing and care of God.

So the people ask, “What shall we do,  
that we may work the works of God?”

Jesus answers -

John 6, verse 29 –

*“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom God has sent.”*

What a minute!

What did You say?

There is only one work you can do to please God – believe in Me.

Again, audacious, hugely audacious.

So, the people challenge Jesus.

They ask for a sign,  
for some miracle to validate His claim.

But did He not just give a sign?

Is not the feeding of the 5,000 sufficient enough validation?

No, it is not.

Why not?

And here we are coming to the heart of the matter.

The multiplication of the bread is not a sufficient sign,

because the bread Jesus fed the 5,000 was “bread from **earth**”  
not “bread from **heaven.**”

The bread Jesus miraculously provided by the seashore  
was not like the bread God provided Israel in the desert.

As William Barclay put it:  
the bread Jesus provided  
“had begun in earthly loaves  
and issued in earthly loaves.”

Are you with the great multitude?

Do you understand their challenge?

They quote from Psalm 78,  
a Psalm that rehearses the Passover events.

They say to Jesus,

John 6, verse 31,

*“Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness;  
as it is written,  
‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”*

“He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.”

To paraphrase the people:

“Jesus, we are impressed by what You did yesterday.  
We really liked the bread You gave us.  
But even You would have to admit that there is a big difference  
between what You gave us and what Moses gave our ancestors.”

THAT is the context in which Jesus is making His “I AM” claim.

So Jesus takes up the challenge.

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#### **4. Which brings us to yet another factor in the context of His “Bread of Life” claim.**

A form.

A sermon form.

John is careful to tell us that Jesus makes His claim in the synagogue.

that is, Jesus develops His claim within the worship life of Israel.

John 6, verse 59.

*“These things He said in the synagogue.”*

Why is this important for us to know?

In the first century, teaching in the synagogue followed a certain form.

The text for the day was read.

Then the preacher for the day would paraphrase the text.

The preacher would then comment on each word of the text one-by-one.

The preacher would conclude by re-phrasing his own paraphrase.



In the synagogue the day after feeding the 5,000,  
the people give Jesus the text.

**“He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”**

Psalm 78, remembering Exodus 16.

**“He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”**

That is the text read in the synagogue service that day.

Now watch what Jesus does.

Look carefully at John 6, verses 32-33.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you,  
it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven,  
but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.  
For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven,  
and gives life to the world.”*

Notice what Jesus has done.

He clarifies that it not Moses but God who gave the manna in the desert.

Such confusion regularly happens:  
God does a new work and some human gets the credit.

Not Moses but God.

And God not only “gave” the bread, but “gives” the bread.

Even now.

And as sweet as the manna is it is not the TRUE heavenly bread.

There is ANOTHER bread that God gives “out of heaven.”

Manna sustained Israel for only 40 years.

This OTHER bread gives life to the whole world for forever.

The people's appetite is awakened.

So is mine!

So they say, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."

Yes Lord!

Give US this bread too.

It is then that Jesus makes His claim.

I am.

I am the bread.

I am the bread of life.

A Person ... bread?

Jesus then expands on His claim  
by following the 1<sup>st</sup> century form for synagogue sermons.

**"He gave them bread out of heaven to eat."**

Not Moses, but God.

Not gave, but gives.

Not just any heavenly bread, but the true bread.

**"Bread out of heaven to eat."**

Jesus works with each word one-by-one.

Bread.

Out of heaven.

To eat.

Bread.

I Am the Bread.

This Jesus develops in verses 35-40.

Out of heaven.

I have come down out of heaven.

This Jesus develops in verses 41-51.

To eat.

Eat this bread and you will live forever.

This Jesus develops in verses 52-57.

WHAT a context in which to make His claim!

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## 5. **There is one more factor.**

A story.

Jesus makes the claim within a larger story being told and celebrated in the Feast.

This is the case with all that Jesus says about anything.

He is speaking from within and to a larger story.

A number of other important Biblical texts were read and reflected on at the Feast.

Exodus 16.

The text says that God will “rain down” bread from heaven each day (16:4).

What a promise!

Bread from heaven in the desert everyday.

And the text says that the people were to go and gather  
a day's portion each day.

Except on the day before the Sabbath,  
when two days worth would "rain down."

The point being that God will provide everyday BUT only one day at a time.

The people will need to go and gather the manna one day at a time.

What does this have to do with Jesus' claim?

Jesus says – John 6, verse 35 –

*"I AM the Bread of Life;  
whoever comes to Me shall never hunger,  
whoever believes in Me shall never thirst."*

That bothered me for the longest time.

For there are times, when having come to Jesus one day,

I am terribly hungry and thirsty the next.

I understand that when I feed on Him  
I will hunger for more of Him ...  
so there will be hunger in that sense.

But I am referring to that sense that I am hungering out of emptiness.

"Come to Me ... **never** hunger;  
believe in Me ... **never** thirst."

What gives?

The tense of the verbs "come" and "believe" – that is what gives.

In the Greek they are in the present tense.

The present tense emphasizes continual action:

"keep on."

Jesus is saying, "keep coming" and "keep believing."

Whoever keeps on coming . . . will never hunger.

Whoever keeps on believing ... will never thirst.

The great multitude at Passover understood the “keep coming.”

The people of Israel had to go and pick up the manna each new day.  
(Exodus 16:22-30).

“I AM the Bread of Life.

You need to come to Me everyday ... keep coming.”

When we find ourselves empty,

and hungering too much for the bread that perishes,

it likely means we have fallen out of the habit

of the “keep coming.”

Keep coming.

Keep believing.

Every day.

There is another important part of the Bible read and studied during Passover.

It is Genesis 2 and 3.

And Jesus works with that text in His claim.

In Genesis 3 we hear and see the phrase “cast out.”

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve,

the sin of declaring independence from God,

which is what eating from

the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil means,

...

because of that sin humanity is “cast out” of the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3, verse 27 –

“So the Lord cast them out ...”

And the text says the Lord stationed angelic guards

to keep humanity from the Tree of Life.

He does not want us to live independently forever.

“Cast out.”

Kept from eating from the Tree of Life.

This text and this theme are in the minds of the worshippers

in the synagogue that Passover.

Everyone who heard Jesus speak had the words fresh in mind.

“I AM the Bread of Life.”

Not just the Bread ... but the Bread of Life.

What “Tree of Life” the inspiration for the phrasing “Bread of Life”?

“I AM the Bread of Life.”

Then – John 6, verse 37 –

*“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me,  
and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”*

NOT cast out!

NOT cast out!

Do you hear Jesus?

The way to the Tree of Life has been opened.

He opened it ... by dealing with the problem of sin.

Come to Me ...

I AM the Tree of Life ???

and I will certainly NOT cast you out!

He ties into the Genesis part of the Story another way.

And here we come to the very heart of Jesus' claim.

In Genesis 2 God warns Adam and Eve not to eat of  
the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

“Do not declare independence from Me ... you will not make it.”

Genesis 2, verse 17 –

“You shall not eat of it lest you die.”

Eat of it and you will die.

Eat of it and you will die.

Genesis 3, verse 6 –

“She took and ate.”

And she died.

And Adam died.

And so did all their children, the whole human race.

Eat of it and die.

Eat of it and die.

The phrase is ringing in the minds of the great multitude that Passover.

Eat of it and die.

READY?

“I AM the Bread of Life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.”

Now listen!

John 6, verse 50.

“This is the bread which comes down out of heaven,  
so that you may **eat of it and not die.**”

Eat of it and not die.

Eat of it and not die.

Eat of it and not die.

**To eat the Bread that is Jesus**

**is to enter into the life we lost at the fall!**

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**SO, Who is Jesus?**

Who is this PERSON we are seeking to follow in the city?

“I AM that-without-which-you-cannot-live.

I AM the final satisfaction of the human soul.

Come to ME ... everyday.

Believe in ME ... everyday.

I give you MYSELF as Living Bread.”

Which is why The Lord’s Supper is the “identifying” feast of the Christian church.



As we meet around the Lord's Table

to remember Him

He comes.

As we meet around His Table

to remember His dying for the sin of the world

He comes to us ....

and feeds us.

The earthly bread and earthly wine/juice

remain earthly bread and earthly wine/juice.

BUT somehow as we eat and drink

Jesus comes ... and feeds us heavenly bread.

He feeds us Himself.

“She took and ate.”

“She took and ate.”

Those verbs do not come together in the rest of the Biblical story.

We do not find “take” and “eat” together anywhere in the rest of the story.

Until the Bread of Life says,

“Take, eat, this is My Body given for you.”

Come .... Let us gather for the Supper.

“This is the Bread that comes out of heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Not cast out.” “Eat and not die.”

