



TOUCH POINT

Bread to Die For – Touchpoint for July 31, 2024

John 6:24-35 (NRSVUE) Jesus the Bread of Life

²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

I absolutely love this endearing conversation the Messiah-chasers have with Jesus. Jesus appears to be saying that it is work to believe where our sustenance comes from. Jesus lovingly tells them that it takes more to believe, that the life he is offering is enough. The work we must do is to believe. It’s not magic, it’s a gift from God, the source of all things.

In 2008, I worked as Director of Christian Growth Services at Remuda Ranch, a center for women with disordered eating, now known as The Meadows Ranch. Our clients struggled with their body image issues, which led to food restrictions. By the time they came to us, they were ravaged by the disorder.

Remuda had a treatment plan that included, of course, nutrient intake to quite literally save them from starvation. While food intake was an urgent concern, it never was about the food.

The adolescent women initially were resistant to any food intake. It wasn’t until they began to understand the origin of their dis-ease and their distorted realities that things began to change. Before, they had seen only flaws in their appearance and character. Their supportive treatment team and fellow PTs bonded and supported each other. A clever group of adolescent women made t-shirts that read, “We came for the food and Prozac brought us together.”

Since we were a “Christ centered” environment, women were often referred to treatment by their home church and pastor. While at Remuda, I was known as “Pastor Henry”, and many scheduled one-on-ones to talk about their issues with God. Some found it a safe place to be angry at the God they’d understood.

This is what I heard from patients who came from Christian schools across the country: they were often told that anorexic behavior is a sin, and that they needed to repent and start eating. They needed to trust God more. For some, their families, though loving, kept them in a Christian bubble with no emotional autonomy. Food became the only thing they could control. The authority figures toggled between being doting parents

and being God's morality cops. This created a distorted view of God and was only reinforced by sending them away to "get right with God" or to "get mentally and medically fixed." Their disillusionment and discouragement about the God of their upbringing did not develop quickly... but it happened.

In other words, their families and churches made it about the food and sin.

Once this monster of a disease is seen for what it is, one can begin to see the distorted images that are created. Their own self-judgments helped to formulate a distorted view of God as well. They have all but said, "I don't want to disappoint God." They believe God must be as disappointed in them as they are in themselves. Guilt and shame feed anxiety and a negative self-worth.

One adult patient's parents told me they felt hopeless and powerless. "Our daughter just won't eat and we can't say anything right. We just want to keep her alive!" they said. I felt powerless also. I suggested something as a last resort. I said, "Do you think you can keep her alive?" They answered no. I suggested, "What if you acknowledge your powerlessness, accept her decisions not to eat and say to her, "You are more valuable to us than your eating disorder. We want to enjoy the weeks we have left with you and not make it about food." They took trips and had late night conversations.

They had made it about the bread. They were valuing her for who she was, not for what she did. They gave her the bread of life! She was able to experience the intimacy of love in their relationship. I would say the results they all experienced were like manna from heaven!

Disordered eating is only one of a number of unfortunate practices that emerge from self-hatred and identity issues. Too often, our religious culture tells us to wear certain masks for the performance of perfection and purity.

If the religious institutions are not a safe, inclusive place, a place of wonder and healing about a love that is immeasurable in depth, height, width and without reservation, then like the followers of Jesus, we are only food-bearing Messiah-chasers.

Whether it be hunger, homelessness, mental health, or self-abuse.

Jesus said they are not only looking for bread for their bodies and minds, but also they are looking for the second coming of the compassion of Jesus, which resides in each one of us. How can Messiah-chasers cross the lake of hopelessness if it's simply about the magic? Where will they go when the earth bread is gone? Jesus said, compassionately, that they didn't need to travel across the water to get to the Jesus revival. They were introduced to the Giver.

It makes me wonder about the depths of our distorted images of God... our God dysmorphic disorders. For many of the patients they had been desperately trying to please God, and their spouses or parents, in a culture that made it all about the bread rather than the Giver.

Seeking a miracle of God, many came to Remuda hoping, after many relapses and mortgaged homes, that there would come an awakening. The awakening was not the latest method and it was not about the behavior (the sin), and it was not about pleasing a parent or a spouse. It's about the unconditional presence of the Giver of bread!

Paraphrasing Jesus, he said, "Y'all saw the miracles and you want to see more magic and more Messiah, and you really want more bread. You had your fill of loaves, but we don't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God the father."

Just like the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan to produce bread from stone during his momentary hunger. Jesus knew a little something about relying on the Giver of the bread of life.

It's making me question how often I make it either about the bread or the Messiah magic. We refer to the money-maker as the bread winner, but it's not only about the bread! Some adult children from well-to-do families will tell you as much. With deep respect and regret they will say, "My folks provided everything we ever wanted growing up... except affection and emotional security and presence." Offerings that come directly from the Source of all things and we share.

Today the mission is to Christians who are orphaned in their own churches, whose voices seek bread to tie them over from service to service. The pastors are like Moses and Jesus. Like Jesus, they would do well to point people to God the father as the source of all things good.

Perhaps some of our churches are so wrapped in traditions that they can only offer dry bread and a symbolic cup. Others are fashioning a clay god out of fears of imperfection, sin management, and politics. Anne Lamott puts it this way: "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." The Giver of bread has just left the building. All that is left is bread.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." He said, "Moses and I are not the Father. Only God the father gives bread from heaven. We are the gift given to you for life and true liberation." Using Father as the term for the source of all things is bad science now that we know a mother isn't just an incubator and man the origin of both egg and sperm. Father represented the source of all things. No wonder Jesus referred to all his friends as his mothers and brothers. When we are together inclusively, we honor the Christ in all people. It is ours to remove the obstacles for people to crawl to spiritual freedom in a world that creates obstacle courses.

When institutions begin idolizing the bread over the Giver of Life, families begin leaving. They become the home churches where bread is broken and shared. Barnum polls call it *a reduction in people who don't believe in God anymore*, Jesus calls them my brothers and my mothers. Sisters and brothers.

What should we then do as people of institutions? How do we become people of the Bread of Life?

When Jesus said, "the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world," the boat followers responded, "Give us this bread always."

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Spirit of the Loving God

(Celtic Spirits)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili: Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Woza nomthwalo wakho,
Woza nomthwalo wakho, Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,
come, bring your burdens to God,
Come, bring your burdens to God for Jesus will never say no.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

Sevenfold Amen

(Keith Duke)

Christ before me. Christ behind me.
Christ above me. Christ below me.
Christ to left and Christ to right.
Christ within both day and night.