

A Sermon Preached by  
Mr. Aran Walter for Proper 14, The Season After Pentecost, Year B  
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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.”

In the name of God . . .

“The bread of life”

Bread

Life

Let’s look at these two words.

Life = Greek = zoe (DZOay)

Loaded word . . . not just “life” as in you’re alive.

Zoe comes from the Jewish understanding that life lived apart from God isn’t really life at all.

Zoe carries with it an understanding that life is not simply meant to be lived here and then you die and then you float off to some other place.

Zoe was about a life lived to the absolute fullness.

A life that was active and vigorous.

It’s a life devoted to God.

A life that aligns itself with the ultimate reality found in the life and teachings of Jesus.

This translation doesn’t really do it justice because it says, “Whoever COMES TO ME will never be hungry”.

Implies that God is over there and we are here separated by this big chasm. But that’s not the understanding of this word Jesus uses.

In actuality, a life (ZOE) lived fully with God must have the understanding that God is HERE, NOW, WITH US!!! We simply need to participate in what God is doing.

Eugene Peterson’s translation (The Message) translates it like this,

“I am the bread of life. The person who ALIGNS WITH ME hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever.”

Zoe isn't about following Jesus in order to get TO GOD'S KINGDOM OUT THERE . . . it's about following Jesus in order to BRING GOD'S KINGDOM HERE!!!

Zoe means that by aligning ourselves with the life and teachings of Jesus, eternal life isn't something that happens later, but begins HERE and NOW!!

Bread = Greek = artos (ARtos)

Artos can also be translated as simply "food". It's essential for survival.

And bread in the 1st century was a staple. It was what sustained you. You took it on trips. Bread was heavy and dense. Without it, you'd be hungry.

More interesting, however, is the fact that Jesus uses this word at this time.

Back up a bit . . . what has just happened?

Feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000. Not the same event.

Feeding of the 5,000 happens in a place that the Jews called "the land of the 12". It was an area where devout Jews from each of the 12 tribes of Israel would come to pray. It was a spot of great significance because it represented where all of God's chosen people could come together in unity and receive blessing from God.

Numbers are always important in Jewish texts. They always point to something else, something larger.

In the feeding of the 5,000 . . . how many baskets of bread and fish are collected even after everyone has had their fill?

TWELVE

This story is all about Jesus being a blessing from God to the entire nation, all 12 tribes, of Israel.

And bread is the symbol of that blessing.

But then the feeding of the 4,000 doesn't take place in the same location.

After the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus tells his disciples to go ahead of him in a boat to the "OTHER SIDE" of the lake (more on "other side" in a bit).

The place they end up is in what's called the Decapolis, east of Galilee. Not a Jewish area. These were the people referred to as pagans . . . they did not follow Yahweh.

The Jews referred to this place as "the land of the 7" because it marked the place where Joshua defeated the 7 pagan nations when the Israelites came into the Promised Land.

This time, after the 4,000 had had their fill, guess how many baskets of bread and fish were left over?

## SEVEN

This is not an accident. The writers of these stories are communicating a fundamental truth about Jesus.

Not only is this Way of Jesus a blessing to God's chosen people, it's for EVERYONE.

EVERYONE is invited in. No matter if you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, white or black, Republican or Democrat, NO ONE IS EXCLUDED from this movement of Jesus.

The OTHER SIDE bit was a Jewish way of referring to "the land of 7". It'd be like saying today, "the other side of the tracks".

We read it just as "the other side of the lake" but for the local Jewish people "other side" meant the pagans, the evil ones, where the evil spirits lived.

This is why the disciples said, "It's a GHOST" when Jesus was walking towards them on the water. THEY WERE FREAKING OUT because the water was where they believed the evil spirits lived and they were heading right into "the land of 7".

And yet, Jesus sends them there, does this miracle, they collect 7 baskets of bread, and once again Jesus shows to the religious establishment that the movement of God is INCLUSIVE, never EXCLUSIVE.

The Way of Jesus seeks to bring THE WHOLE WORLD, ALL NATIONS, ALL PEOPLE, EVERYONE into the Kingdom of God . . .

into ZOE . . . a vigorous and fully devoted to God life . . . HERE!!! NOW!!!

So when Jesus says "I am the bread of life" . . . he's inviting us to the ultimate reality that, by aligning with the Way of Jesus, we display ZOE to the world . . . AND EVERYONE is welcomed into God's Kingdom.

And so the challenge for us as Christians, is this . . .

Who's on the "other side" for us? Who scares us? Are there those among us who we feel don't belong? Do we display a Gospel that says to certain people, "The bread of life isn't for you".

May we be the kind of community that displays a ZOE kind of life . . . a life that shows the world that this bread is for EVERYONE.