

## The Bread That the Lord Has Given You to Eat

John 6:24-35

As far as most material things in life go, you get what you pay for. What seems like a great bargain at Dollar General, sooner or later has its flaws exposed during the wear and tear of everyday usage. Then there are purchases which, while initially expensive, in the long run prove to be a better investment because of their durability. You pay more, to get more quality and use out of them.

L.L. Bean is a company with a reputation for the ruggedness and longevity of whatever they sell. So, much so, that their products came with an unconditional lifetime warranty. If an item bought from them *ever* wore out or broke down, you just had to bring it back and get a replacement, no questions asked.

Until February of 2018. That was when they discontinued the lifetime warranty policy, because customers were returning purchases made years—sometimes even decades—before. Instead of a testament to the superior quality of the merchandise, customers were using the warranty as a kind of open-ended product replacement merry-go-round.

I guess even L.L. Bean finally had to admit that nothing lasts forever—including their products.

Last week, in the first sermon in this series on “Nourished by the Bread of Life”, we heard about how Jesus fed 5000 people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, and sent them home with full bellies. But now it is the morning after. And guess what? They all woke up hungry again. Some of them track Jesus down, in the hope that maybe he offers an unlimited refill policy. And Jesus knows what they’re there for. Instead of whipping another banquet up for them, he gives them some advice. He tells them not to work for food that fills you up for a day but eventually leaves you hungry for more; but to strive for the food that endures for eternal life. That is the food God really wants to give them. This is the food that God sent him to deliver. This is the true bread that comes from heaven and gives life to the world.

They want to know what they have to do to get their hands on this non-perishable food. What will it cost them? Jesus answers that all they have to do is to believe in him—believe that he is the one God sent to deliver the food that never perishes. But what is it exactly that they need to believe? He said, “*I am* the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

They responded enthusiastically, “Sir, give us this food always!” They remembered another miracle from the distant past. When the Israelites were newly liberated from being slaves in Egypt. They wandered through the wilderness where food and water were hard to come by.

But God told their leader, Moses, that God would rain down bread from heaven for them to eat. Every morning this heavenly bread—which they called manna—appeared. The first time it

appeared the people asked, “What is it? Moses answered, “This is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.” When Jesus told them that the heavenly bread, he would provide would mean they would never be hungry, they thought of the manna that kept their ancestors alive. But Jesus did not come to be a food delivery service. He came to deliver us.

A unique characteristic of John’s Gospel is that he doesn’t typically use the word “miracle” when referring to Jesus’ miraculous deeds. John calls them “signs” instead. Because, in John’s opinion, the purpose of Jesus’ miracles goes beyond the healing of bodies or the provision of material needs, as important as those things may be. The ultimate significance of the miracles is that they serve as “signs” that reveal who Jesus truly is, so that they can “believe” in him. So they can believe that he is not just someone who can provide them with bread to keep the body alive; but that he is God’s instrument for providing something so much more essential to life. That he is the Bread of Life. Not this life only, which is impermanent and perishable—but eternal life.

It is the same lesson that we relive every time we share the sacrament of Holy Communion. When we gather around these elements, we remember that Jesus took ordinary perishable bread and told the disciples that it was a sign to help us believe in his own imperishable body, sent down from heaven. The body that he would soon give so that we might receive the gift of eternal life. He broke the bread and blessed it, saying, “This is my body, that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me,” and he distributed that bread to the disciples who were gathered around him.

Another detail that sets John apart from the other three Gospels is that John is the only one who did not record the details of that Last Supper. But perhaps John’s Gospel does impart the same message in its own way. When Jesus took bread on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee, held it up in thanks to God, then broke it and distributed it to the crowd, that food also became a sign by which people were being invited into a soul-saving and lifechanging relationship.

And that is where the axiom that “you get what you pay for”—which is unequivocally true, whether you are talking about Dollar General or LL Bean—runs head on into the one exception to the rule. Which is that there is no price-tag on the relationship with God that Jesus makes possible. Because Jesus paid the price for us. It is only up to us to believe that. Jesus is the Bread of life that nourishes us as no earthly meal ever could. It is his very body given and blood shed, on a different hill outside of Jerusalem, that saves *us* from being perishable, and invites us into an intimate and imperishable relationship with God. A relationship which in turn, hopefully inspires us to lives of service to others that reflects Christ’s imperishable life that is being lived through us.

At the Communion table we are nourished with perishable food and drink. With the passage of time, the bread would become stale and moldy. The wine or juice would grow sour and eventually evaporate. But together they are signs of an imperishable and eternal existence that we are invited to be a part of.

May we never settle for anything less than the Bread that Lord has given us to eat.

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