

## **“I AM the Bread of Life”**

Rev. Dr. Peter Bynum

April 6, 2025

*<sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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.”*

*<sup>28</sup>Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” <sup>30</sup>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? <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup>They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” <sup>35</sup>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.” (John 6:24-35)*

I think all of us have restaurants that we remember from growing up – favorite places that we used to love. Some were nice, but a lot of them were more everyday places. For me, one of those more pedestrian places was Quincy’s Steakhouse. I think it was more of a Southeastern thing, but some of you may remember the chain. It was definitely the kind of place where, before the server ever came near to us, some responsible or parental type at the table would utter that dire warning “Don’t fill up on bread.”

Usually good advice, but at Quincy’s it was an utterly hopeless cause, because Quincy’s was the home of a uniquely delicious and addictive kind of bread. I did a quick Google search to confirm my memory and it popped up immediately: a television ad from the early 80’s starring a golden-brown, individually-sized piece of bread. There he was, just like I remember him, a rapping, moon-walking loaf calling out to the tween version of me: “Here’s a deal you gotta see, a special meal and it comes with me, I’m the big, fat yeast roll!”

That’s actually what they called them. “The big, fat yeast roll” was a trademark of Quincy’s, and it was the star of that commercial for good reason, because for the life of me I cannot remember anything else I may or may not have eaten at a Quincy’s. But I remember those rolls. Hot, soft, glazed with glistening butter, melt-in-your-mouth baked heaven. One was never enough, but anything more than that was always too much. Before I even made my way to the salad bar, I was already feeling the ill effects. That bloated, greasy, “What have I done?” feeling. But I knew what I had done – I had filled up on bread.

Interestingly, the story of Jesus saying “I am the bread of life” begins in a similar way. It is the morning after one of Jesus’ biggest miracles. The day before a huge crowd had gathered, five thousand in all, and the disciples were panicked because everyone was getting hungry and there was no way they could buy lunch for that big a crowd. All they



could find was a little kid who had five loaves of bread and two fish. “Make the people sit down,” Jesus had said, and then he took the loaves, blessed them, and then started distributing the pieces. Same with the fish. Somehow there was enough to feed the entire crowd, and it wasn’t a snack. Everyone was full. What the text actually says is “they were satisfied.” There were even leftovers -- twelve large baskets of bread.

So now it is the next day and the crowd goes looking for Jesus again. What do they want? What do they expect to find? When they catch up with Jesus, he is on to them. “You are looking for me,” he says, “not because you saw something mystical and miraculous, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”

In other words, yesterday their bellies had been filled. Their physical hunger had been satisfied. But even a great meal only lasts a while. It was a new day, and they were hungry again. So now, as my seminary professor Frances Taylor Gench has written, they were looking for Jesus because they were looking “for another free lunch.”<sup>1</sup> What I would say is, they were ready for another round of big, fat yeast rolls.

But today, Jesus has a different plan. Yes, he had fed them with literal bread the day before. But in the light of the following day he wants to talk about a different kind of food – not a food that perishes, but “*the food that endures for eternal life.*” They are hungry for actual food from heaven, like the manna that God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness, but Jesus says, “I am not talking about that kind of bread... I am talking about *the true bread from heaven... the bread of God [that] comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*”

Jesus is clearly talking about a different kind of hunger... a spiritual hunger... an existential longing of the soul. Jesus knew the people that were following him needed more than a meal. They were searching for something more. They knew, deep down, that something was broken and ailing in the world... that something was broken and ailing in their own spirit... that there was a hole in their life that could not be denied, And deep down they also knew that, whatever it was that could fill that spiritual hole, whatever it was that might satisfy this deep hunger, it had to be something good, something pure, something true, something that has lasting, even eternal, value. This kind of deep hunger is something that no physical thing can fill or satisfy – no material possession, no bank account, no college acceptance letter or new job, no honor, or privilege, or human relationship. This hunger can only be satisfied by bread from heaven, the bread of God. This is the truth, the reality of deep spiritual hunger, that Jesus has in mind when he says, “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.*”

The sad thing is that, while this kind of spiritual hunger cannot be denied, people are still looking for the big, fat yeast roll.

When Jesus calls himself the bread of life, the same thing happened that happened every time he made a lofty statement about who he was. People got offended and pushed back. “Who do you think you are?” they say, “You’re not the bread of heaven. You are just Joseph’s kid from Nazareth.” And what happened next is stated very matter-of-factly in the text: “*many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*”<sup>2</sup> Plenty of people were happy to get fed up on the hillside with five loaves and two fish, but not so many were interested in something more difficult to swallow. Not many were interested in taking a hard look inward, not many interested in doing the hard work of change, not many

---

<sup>1</sup> Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> John 6:66.

interested in following Jesus into a new way of being satisfied. No thanks, they said. We're looking for a different kind of meal ticket. And people are still making that same choice every day. We seem to be chasing that feeling of being full, trying to fill ourselves with all kinds of worldly things that seem bright and shiny, but when we finally consume them, we find that we still somehow feel empty. We are filling up on big, fat yeast rolls, but within minutes we realize that we feel full, but we are far from satisfied. Our bellies are filled, but we have missed the meal.

When Mother Theresa was serving the poor in Calcutta, one of the many correspondents who went to India to write about her quoted her as saying that, as severe and wrenching as the physical hunger was in that place at that time, she was convinced that there was an even greater famine – a spiritual famine that was an even more terrible hunger in the modern world.<sup>3</sup> “The greatest disease in the West today,” she said, “is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God... [and] the hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.”<sup>4</sup>

It is the same kind of spiritual crisis that Amos described in this prophecy written thousands of years ago: “*The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but [a famine] of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.*”<sup>5</sup>

Lent is the perfect time for us to ponder that prophecy, and to really consider what kinds of things we are seeking. What are we hungry for? Is it status? Is it wealth? Is it a life of leisure or a feeling of safety? What are we prioritizing and pursuing with our time and our energy? Once we begin to be honest about our real hungers and the ways we are trying to fill ourselves up, then we can start answering the real question, “Am I seeking the kind of satisfaction that is fleeting and perishable, or the kind that is enduring and eternal?”

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, which many describe as the “Hall of Fame” of faith, Moses is lifted up as one of the all-time greats. And the reason he is lifted up as an example for everyone to follow is that he clearly understood the difference between material hunger and spiritual hunger, and he knew the difference between feeling full and feeling truly satisfied. “*By faith,*” the scripture says, “*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward.*”<sup>6</sup> The key phrase here is “the fleeting pleasures of sin.” This is the enduring truth to be passed through the ages, the truth that sin, no matter how delicious it appears to be, only satisfies for a season. Sin goes stale very quickly, turns foul very quickly.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland, “Mother Teresa and Spiritual Hunger,” <https://www.thealaskanmuse.com/2014/02/mother-teresa-and-spiritual-hunger.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.azquotes.com/quotes/topics/spiritual-hunger.html>

<sup>5</sup> Amos 8:11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 11:24-25.

Not so with the bread of life, because the bread of life is God's Word and God's wisdom. Not so with the bread of heaven, because the bread of heaven sustains us, empowers us, equips us for lives of faithfulness. Not so with the things of God, who says "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"<sup>7</sup> These are the things that really satisfy, not just for a season, but for a lifetime and beyond.

And with boldness, confidence, and assurance, Christ identifies himself as the key to this enduring spiritual satisfaction and the Way to true fulfillment. As the Matthew Henry says, "He is to the soul what bread is to the body – what we see and learn and do in Him feeds us, nourishes us, and fills us beyond measure."<sup>8</sup> He is the Way who "manifests the fullness of God's love, drawing humans into a lasting relationship that begins now in faith and endures beyond the grave."<sup>9</sup>

For what do we hunger? What are we trying to grab in hopes that it will fill an empty place in our lives? The big, fat yeast rolls of life are tempting for sure. But those kinds of things only satisfy for a season, and they always end with that bloated, greasy, "What have I done?" feeling. Christ invites us to worry about a different kind of hunger, and seek a different kind of food, food that never spoils, never disappoints, and never fails.

So, the old warning holds true, but like every enduring rule, it needs a caveat: "Don't fill up on bread, unless, of course, it is the bread of life."

**Amen.**

---

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:6.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/john/6-35.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Gench at 43.