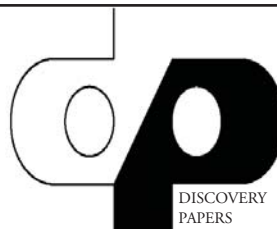




## FOOD THAT LASTS FOREVER



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John 6:14-34  
14th Message  
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All good storytellers know the value of a cliffhanger, breaking off a tale at a point where the audience is eager to find out what will happen next. We ended last week's study at just such a moment. The 14th verse of John 6 finishes the dramatic story of the feeding of the 5,000. As the sun set, Jesus' disciples held overflowing baskets of food and looked out on a crowd that was growing restless with anticipation. It was the time of year to celebrate the Passover and the people were mindful of Moses, the Exodus, liberation, miracles, and the visible presence of God. There was a crescendo of excitement around Jesus. What will happen next? Let's pick up the story.

John 6:14-15:

**When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"**

**<sup>15</sup>Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.**

The phrase, "prophet who has come into the world" harkens back to Moses (Deut. 18:18). The immense, public miracle of providing food for thousands of needy Israelites in a wilderness setting made the people think of Jesus (rightly) in Messianic terms, one who might be king. However, as Messiah, Jesus will act on his own terms instead of following the demands of a crowd. Jesus withdrew from them to be alone—a king who would let God, not people, determine his future.

With this regal departure we still are left to ask what comes next. In this message we will give attention to two stories beginning at v. 16. The first is an account of the disciples in frightening circumstances. At the heart of this event is the statement "Do not be afraid."

The second occurs after all who had traveled to the remote hillside east of the Sea of Galilee had returned to Capernaum on the western shore. There a crowd gathers around Jesus. The center of events in this case is the Lord's statement, "You seek me because you ate your fill."

John 6:16-17:

**When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup>got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.**

A couple things to note. First, it is implied here but made clear in the synoptic gospels that his followers went on this boat journey, because Jesus told them to. Second, because thoughts of the Exodus are in the air, this scene calls to mind the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea, another occasion that featured wind, darkness, and danger.

John 6:18-21:

**The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup>When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. <sup>20</sup>But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup>Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.**

Bible students, ancient and modern, have understood the story of this journey by boat as a metaphor for chaos, danger, and stress (storms) that come into the lives of all who follow Christ. With that in mind, what lessons are we taught?

First, we note that the disciples were told what to do but not why. Jesus directed them to return to their home in Capernaum. But why in the middle of the night? Why under adverse and frightening circumstances? Jesus doesn't answer these questions. God's will for us—the challenges, opportunities, gifts, and struggles we have—are his to determine. He doesn't have to explain his reasons and often does not.

Further, the disciples knew that their experience of his absence was not because he'd forgotten them. They weren't "out of sight, out of mind." His commitment to them hadn't wavered despite their great difficulties. Similar awareness on our part is a source of hope. Even when we

feel desperate the story isn't over.

The words of Jesus change everything. His arrival is frightening but his words are filled with comfort. Two short sentences: "It is I. Do not be afraid."

The statement, "It is I" in Greek is, 'ego eimi.' In the context it surely refers to his mysterious arrival to join his disciples in the boat. But it can also be rendered 'I am.' This phrase is a favorite of John's, hearkening back to the scene at the burning bush when Moses heard God name himself, "I am who I am" (Yahweh in Hebrew). The one who arrived to save distressed disciples on the Sea of Galilee is Lord of heaven and earth. John writes about the life of Jesus in a manner that expands our imagination and our faith.

How does Jesus minister to us in stormy circumstances—"It is I, don't be afraid"? Each of us is different and our need for him varies throughout our lives. He might come with a touch as he did to Thomas who was held back by his doubts (John 20:27). Perhaps like Mary Magdalene, blinded by grief at the garden tomb (John 20:16). Jesus will speak our name by the Spirit in ways we cannot explain. The Lord appeared to Paul in a vision when he was overwhelmed with the stress of ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10). The utterly depleted Elijah, alone in a wilderness cave, heard the voice of God as a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12). Maybe, simply, the Lord will send a friend to give us needed counsel and encouragement at a critical moment and we will recognize the Lord's voice speaking through his servant, "Do not be afraid."

Beginning at v. 25 we take up a second text that flows from Jesus' miracle. Here the central theme is appetite, not fear.

John 6:25-27:

**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, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking 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 to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."**

Though the crowd addresses him as rabbi, their question is not really an attempt to learn anything. Their motive, as it was when they sought to "make him king", is to harness a miracle worker to give them what they want when they

want it. Jesus' response is a direct but loving challenge, telling his listeners to attend to lasting not transient things.

Of course Jesus does not disparage ordinary labor or deny the need for food and shelter. In his statement, "Don't work for the food that perishes" he is speaking of work as a life goal, that which we value above all else.

We live in a world where sophisticated pursuit of "food that perishes"—gourmet meals, elegant clothing, lavish entertainment—is widespread. Jesus' instruction about what to value challenges these pursuits just as it challenged poor Galileans who sought a reliable source of fish and loaves.

There's an old poem that illustrates our problem:

*"Into this world to eat and sleep and know no reason why he was born but merely to consume the corn, devour the cattle, fowl, and fish and leave behind an empty dish." We have not been created in God's image to serve our appetites.*

Jesus made the same point in the Sermon on the Mount:

"... do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ...<sup>32</sup>your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:25-33).

Our loving Father knows our needs and will provide what we require. We are called to seek ("work for" in John 6:27) a life that honors God and delights in him. This includes joy in his presence, rest in his love, wonder at his beauty, and making him known by acting justly and telling the truth in a dark world. We have been made for something much greater than shuffling from one meal to the next.

Returning to John 6, the questions of the crowd and the statements of Jesus begin a long discourse which we'll consider more closely in messages to follow. For now, one more paragraph—pulling out three statements in particular.

John 6:28-34:

**Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing 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, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?”<sup>31</sup>Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”<sup>32</sup>Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.<sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”<sup>34</sup>They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”**

Lets first consider the question, “What must we do?” It is easy to see ourselves in this isn’t it? We want to approach God with a list of accomplishments. We want to fix what is broken. Jesus’ answer is all grace: “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom he has sent.”

There is one choice to make and nothing else to do. That choice is to enter a living relationship with the Savior whom God has sent. “Believe in the one whom he has sent.” Belief goes much beyond acknowledgement of facts. It is trusting in and bowing before Christ as Lord. All of our doing follows and flows from a choice to believe in the sent-one.

The second sentence to take from these verses is also a question—an accusing question. “What work do you perform?” Jesus refused to perform another food miracle at their insistence and they reply by challenging him to a contest with Moses of old. Once again Jesus opens our eyes to greater truths. “It was not Moses (merely God’s servant) who gave you any of those things. It is my Father who gives them to you.” Note that he uses the present tense. They are fascinated with Moses (who was resisted by the people of his own day) and fail to acknowledge the generosity of God who gives us all that we need whether as miraculous manna or an as ordinary harvest.

Finally we come to the last sentence of verse 34:

**They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”**

And here is the cliffhanger that looks ahead to what comes next. Are these people still asking Jesus to feed their stomachs or have they begun to understand the greater things he has spoken about? And what about us—are we seeking that food that endures to eternal life?