

John 6:24-35^{vii viii}

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.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 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. 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." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 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? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

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. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 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."

Quietly consider: What is the manna that will satisfy my deep longings?

^{vii} **About John 6:24-35**

Today's passage is the preface to the bread of life discourse. It illustrates John's favorite ways of shaping a dialogue. One is the use of misunderstanding; another is that a question asked on one level is answered on a higher level. Set in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59), this discourse relies on concepts and structures common to rabbinic sermons at the time.

The crowd addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" or teacher, often the first title of respect given to Jesus by strangers (1:38, 3:2). The crowd's factual question: "When did you come here?" is answered theologically in terms of Jesus' origin (7:28-29). Jesus here identifies himself as

“Son of Man...from heaven” (vv. 27, 33).

Jesus charges the crowd with having responded only to the material meaning of the feeding, not to its spiritual significance. They answer by picking up the theme of works, asking what the works are that God desires them to do (3:21). The reply is that there is only one work that God desires to accomplish in them, obedient trust in Jesus. This is John’s contribution to the faith/works issue: faith is itself a work, the acceptance of God’s work in Jesus.

The crowd requests a sign from him to validate his teaching so that they may “believe” (rather than “believe in”) him. They challenge the prophet-like-Moses (6:14; Deuteronomy 18:15) to produce manna. Jesus answers that their desire has already been fulfilled. Bread was, in rabbinic writings, a symbol of the Torah given to Moses. Jesus’ teaching is the bread they should crave. The bread God gives in the present is “that which comes down from heaven” (v. 33), the revelation of God made personal in the incarnation of Jesus.

Verse 35 is the first of the many “I am” statements in the Gospel of John. Jesus uses the “I am” statements (bread of life, 6:35; light of the world, 8:12; door, 10:7; good shepherd, 10:11; resurrection and life, 11:25; way, truth and life, 14:6; true vine, 15:1) to reveal the dimensions of his relationship to humankind.

^{viii} **Reflection and Response**

Psalm 78 describes one purpose of religious education: to declare “things that we have heard and known,” to “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has wrought.” The Judeo-Christian religion is historical, based upon God’s saving acts, directly experienced by God’s people. That God is, above all, a saving, life-preserving presence is the conviction of scripture;. Trust in God is the singular challenge of the Bible. Yet when adversity comes, we may forget all yesterday’s providence in our present panic.

Despite the parting of the Red Sea and a miraculous provision of water, hunger caused the Israelites to grumble. So God rains down food in abundance: bread from heaven, a reversal of the natural order. God wanted the people to know the generosity of their God. In a miracle of even more astounding proportions, Jesus reverses the order of human nature. Just as he transforms the people’s skepticism into earnest request, so he turns scarcity into abundance.

The Johannine version of the feeding of the five thousand is followed by a discourse between Jesus and the crowd. The people asked Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” The work of God in Judaism meant a practical list of deeds and duties. Jesus’ answer to this question is hardly in accordance with tradition. Therefore, the people ask for a sign that they might believe such an astonishingly simple explanation of God’s work. After all, they say, “Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness.” Then Jesus interprets for them the spiritual meaning of the physical sign of manna.

Jesus alludes to his own life, come down from heaven, which feeds the world and preserves life forever. With no understanding, the people plead, “give us this bread always.” With perhaps a degree of understanding, we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We are not praying merely for physical

necessities. We are also praying for that daily bread of divine encounter with Christ, who brings us into eternal life. Without him, we perish from hunger and thirst in the wilderness.