

July 29, 2018
John 6:32-40
Pastor Rosanna McFadden
Creekside COB

“Bread of Life”

Good morning! Over the past few weeks I have heard some news stories that have gotten me wondering: what must we have in order to live? There are some medical answers to that question: a healthy person can live about 3 minutes without air, 3 days without water, and 3 weeks without food. I think most of us would agree, however, that surviving and *living* are not exactly the same thing.

The coverage of the boys from the Thai soccer team and their coach who were trapped in a cave for almost three weeks started me wondering about this. They had only a little food to share for the first nine days, and no light until they were found by divers. As you know, all the boys were rescued and survived. As with groups of miners and other folks who have been trapped underground, the fact that there was a group that stayed together and had as leader who encouraged them probably made a significant difference. Once we get beyond the basics of what sustains survival, we have to figure out what it means to live. Can we live without love? Without hope? Without purpose? How about someone who can't live without a double caramel skinny latte with whipped cream? People survive without any of those things all the time, but I think it's worth considering what makes living more than simply surviving.

The gospel of John, through the words of Jesus, illustrates the spiritual world through the physical world. This happens when Jesus is explaining a spiritual reality in physical terms, and the listener just doesn't get it. Whaaat? In John 3, Jesus is speaking to Jewish teacher, and tells him that he must be born from above. “Whaaat?” says Nicodemus. “ You're telling me I have to enter my mother's womb a second time?” which gives Jesus the opportunity to explain the idea of being born in the Spirit. In John 4, Jesus encounters a

Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, and tells her he can give her living water. And she says, "Whaaat? You don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep: how are you going to get living water?" And Jesus explains that the water he's talking about is the water of eternal life. In John 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind. The Jews are unhappy about this healing happening on the Sabbath, and try to get the man to renounce his story. Jesus tells the Jews that he came so that those who are blind can see, and those who can see may become blind. And the Jews look at each other and say, "Whaat? We're not blind!" And Jesus explains that their problem is that they *think* they can see, but they are actually blind to their sin.

Our text from chapter 6 is part of this whole pattern of Jesus using a physical reality to illustrate a spiritual truth. There has been some literal feeding as a lead up to this exchange with the crowd. At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus is out teaching a crowd of folks who are getting restless and hungry out in the country with nothing to eat. A boy in the crowd shares his lunch of five loaves and two fish, and with it, Jesus feeds the whole multitude. The next day, this same crowd gets in boats and follows Jesus across the Sea of Galilee, clamoring for more bread. Jesus tells them it his Father who gives them bread from heaven. And the crowd says, "Yes! That's what we want!" And Jesus tells them, "It's me. I am the bread of life. If you come to me you will never be hungry." And the Jews says "Whaaat? Are we supposed to eat his flesh? That's disgusting."

The reality is that life is both physical and spiritual. We must have the physical in order to survive. The spiritual reality of life is not separate from the physical: the spiritual is revealed through the physical. The bread and cup that we will share in this service are actual, physical things. They are not magical, they do not -- in the Brethren understanding of communion -- undergo transubstantiation. That is, the bread and cup do not become *literal* flesh and blood. The power of their transformation lies in their ability to transform us; to reveal the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ and his love and sacrifice for us, through the tangible realities of bread and juice. We can survive without Jesus Christ, or any kind of awareness of a spiritual life, but in order to live -- a life with substance and meaning and hope -- we need the bread of life. We are nourished and sustained with an

awareness of God's care and provision for us, a sense that our lives have been given to us for something more than survival.

I heard another news story last week which I found intriguing. It was about bread. Specifically about some charred bread which was taken from the remains of a fire. It looked like something you might find stuck in the bottom of your toaster, except that this scrap of bread was 14,000 years old. That's a significant number because scientists have determined that humans started to cultivate grain about 10,000 years ago -- and until this piece of bread was carbon dated, scientists had assumed that cultivation came first, and then people figured out how to make bread. This discovery shows that it was the other way around: making bread was what led to cultivating grain. Whaaat? The physical reality of bread began a whole chapter of civilization which spread all over the world. As we prepare to break and share the bread and cup of communion, in recognition and celebration of Jesus Christ, the bread of life, I want to share some images of bread. Please accept these as a sign of human ingenuity and diversity, as well as a sign of the many ways in which God cares for us, and the many opportunities we have to celebrate Jesus. May you come to the Lord's table with the conviction that it is Jesus transforms survival into life.