

Something About the Bread: Ordinary
Sermon #232 | Greystone Baptist Church | August 25, 2024
John 6:35, 41-51

For those of us whose lives revolve around the school and church calendars, this is the final gasp of summer. On Tuesday, kids in public school and on the traditional calendar will begin classes, marking the beginning of a new year. Some have already started back - there are so many schedules in this place between public and private, year-round and traditional, charter and so one and so forth. But 'tis the season, so the saying goes, of "back to school."

Though the liturgical calendar has Christians celebrating our new year with the start of Advent in December, the churches generally have a program year that mirrors the school year. Probably because whether or not we have kids in school, whether or not we are teachers, the hot and humid summer air offers us all a chance to travel a bit, to rest a bit, and hopefully to breathe a little deeper, because the busy-ness of the other months catches up with us.

We all need a break. And summer can be a break.

I have to say can be because there are those like Anna Beth and April who work double time in the summer both planning ahead for the coming year and taking our children and youth to camps and mission trips. So for whatever these past couple of months have been, we give thanks and we recognize now, that the summer is coming to an end. It is hard to believe, isn't it?

II.

As we prepare to send Mia to Middle School, I find myself thinking more about the passage of time - how quick it goes - and the importance of the friendships that have sustained me along the way.

Can you remember your own first day of school? Whether it was elementary, middle, high, college, or some kind of graduate program. Remember what it felt like to stand on the brink of something new and wonder about what might be in store?

I can remember preparing for middle school. My family had moved over the summer back to the Charlotte area after 5 years in Wilmington. I was struggling - big time - with the move because the move meant a new school, a new house, a new sister (mom was expecting Sarah, who I call the replacement baby - as I'd been the youngest for 11 years - it's OK I'm not bitter)... so many new things when all I needed was something solid, an anchor. That anchor came in the form of a friendship.

Marie and I were both new to the school district, she came from a private school and I'd recently moved from Wilmington. We quickly connected because neither of us had any other friends and we were both dancers. So we took all the same classes and hung out after school. We always found each other at school socials and in the cafeteria. We've lost touch over the years after moving away for college, getting married, having kids, and settling into careers in different cities..

but I will never forget our friendship and the ways it saved me from so many adolescent nightmares.

You know I can't remember many of the specifics - where we hung out, what exactly we did, what we talked about - but I will always remember the bread we shared anytime we were in her family's kitchen or mine.

I know I've spent the last few weeks telling you about all the delicious breads that have characterized my life but this one, the kind Marie and I always shared, wasn't fancy at all. It was the most ordinary bread there is. Sunbeam, white bread. We loved it! And anytime our parents weren't supervising we'd take **as many pieces as we could** and load it up with butter, then cover the top with sugar... **butter sugar bread**. It was our middle school delicacy.

As we made it we would laugh and laugh at what our parents would say if they saw all that sugar. We'd sneak it away to our rooms and delight in each others' company. Life-giving friendship in every single sugary bite.

II.

I am the bread of life, Jesus says.

In today's reading Jesus is still with the crowds that gathered earlier in chapter 6. We've been following their story for several weeks now. And we're at an inflection point today as some among them - perhaps many (?) Perhaps a few (?) we don't know. Some among them **start to question** Jesus' authority, his authenticity, his validity.

'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?'

Surely this isn't the same Jesus? Walking around town teaching with authority, multiplying food in order to feed the hungry, and talking about being the bread of life? That's not possible, he's not that extraordinary, in fact we happen to know he is rather ordinary. We know his momma and his daddy and we have good information that his birth story was rather questionable... if not downright scandalous.

How can he now say: I came down from heaven? ...
How can he say: I am the bread of life?

III.

Jesus goes on to say a lot more about what he means by that. There's a lot of scholarship to read on it and we've covered some of it in previous weeks, we'll probably get into some more of that next week. But today I want to keep it really simple. Because today, I think the message for us is quite simple, and it is here, as we listen to the crowds who question Jesus' authority, integrity, and value.

The crowds pressing Jesus, are asking questions, engaging him in conversation... trying to understand what he is saying and trying their best to reconcile his words with the person they know him to be - Joseph's son!

They are struggling to figure out how someone like them, (as to be in human skin (remember Philippians)) someone so ordinary could possibly be so extra-ordinary. How can you be Christ, the messiah, the embodiment of the incarnate God? Aren't you Mary and Joseph's son?

IV.

Dr. Karoline Lewis is a John scholar and a professor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. In her commentary on John she sees a theme, a thread woven throughout the Gospel, a MAIN POINT that Jesus is trying to make about God and about what it means to believe in God - according to John's version of the Good News. In her chapter on today's reading she summarizes:

To believe in Jesus as the Bread of Life is primarily to acknowledge the relationship between God and God's people. The bread from heaven is provided for the Israelites **whom God loves and will not abandon.** In the wilderness, God is present, providing for God's people, and God's people [can] rely on God for that provision. To believe in Jesus as the bread from heaven is to recognize that relationship. It is to believe in the relationship and what that relationship means, both then and now. Karoline Lewis, John, p. 90

Jesus is teaching the disciples that - though they may be searching for a magnificent sign... sometimes the sign is as simple and seemingly ordinary as friendship. That life-sustaining bread isn't always fancy, sometimes it's rather ordinary. Life-sustaining bread isn't always a crusty loaf of artisan sourdough, sometimes it's a sunbeam sandwich loaf.

It's an appropriate lesson for us in this season that the church calls "**Ordinary Time**" (a title some of you have asked me about, printed on the bulletins.... It's another term for the weeks after pentecost, the weeks where "nothing special" like Advent or Christmas or Epiphany or Lent or Easter are happening... it is "Ordinary Time" which reminds us that sometimes if not most of the time, Christ shows up in the most ordinary of ways. We just need eyes to see and ears to hear...

V.

I heard a story the other day about a woman who lost her brother, suddenly. The whole family was in shock and so they'd gathered together to grieve and mourn. As they did so, they began to notice that people from their brother's church were showing up. One posted outside the house with a cooler and a notepad. Receiving gifts of food, taking down names of those bringing it, and then sending the people on their way. Another in the house - quietly scurrying around not bothering the family but cleaning, doing laundry, washing dishes... The church people did all the ordinary things this family needed to survive - and as they did - they became the presence of Christ for them.

Kathleen Norris - Spiritual writer, poet, teacher -

In her book, *Quotidian Mysteries: The Laundry, Liturgy, and Women's Work* - writes about a time in her life when she thought "Faith" was in the past. She went to a wedding mass with some family and when the magnificent ceremony was over, she caught a glimpse of the priest once robed in high liturgical garments, in simple clothes cleaning up the sanctuary.... doing the dishes, scooping up the crumbs, work that she'd assumed would be left for a humble janitor. Seeing the priest doing such lowly and **ordinary** work became a pathway back to faith.

Finding the presence of Christ in our lives and being the presence of Christ for and with others DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FANCY... in fact, it is most often, so very ordinary.

A casserole baked with love and dropped off on somebody's front porch.

A slice of white bread with butter and sugar loaded up on top.

A friend, who shows up time and time again - with nothing fancy - just ordinary presence - companionship - life-sustaining relationship.

VI.

You all are really good at showing up for one another. I have seen you do it time and time again. But sometimes I wonder if we forget how important that "showing up" really is. Sometimes it seems so "ordinary" when we are looking for something more "extraordinary" ...

So in the next few moments as we prepare for the Hymn of Response, I'd like you to take a piece of ordinary bread. (passed around in baskets) and think about the ways that you have experienced the gift of relationship - the gift of friendship - the presence of Christ shown in and through your friends. And as you take that bread, receive it and give God thanks for those gifts.

But don't stop there.

As you give thanks - pray for eyes to see and ears to hear this week - ask for ordinary opportunities to GO AND BE that friend, that presence of Christ to others. Doesn't have to be anything fancy...because sometimes, if not most of the time, God shows up in the most ordinary of ways.

Invitation

During the hymn, as we pass the bread I will stand down front. I'll be there to join you in a word of prayer if that's what you need. I'll also be there to hear from anyone who has a decision they'd like to share. Whether that's a moment to dedicate your life to Christ, or a desire to join the church as a member.

However God is speaking to us today - whether in extraordinary or oh-so-ordinary ways - let us listen, give thanks, and respond.