

## “Good Eats—Part One”

Throughout the gospels the crowds tend to be a little thickheaded. The disciples, Jesus’ inner circle, are often quite dense as well. This is especially true in Gospel of John where Jesus often speaks like a Greek philosopher or a German theologian. That is he comes at the idea from different sides without ever getting directly to the center, waiting for his listeners to get there on their own.

We have at least two advantages over Jesus’ first hearers. First, we have the entire Jesus story in front of us. We know how it progresses and we know how it ends. Many of us have been hearing these stories from childhood. We have read them, studied them, and heard numerous sermons on them.

Second, and this is just as crucial as the previous advantage, we have full bellies. The relative ease we have at meeting our daily needs for food and drink means we are not focused so distinctly on our bodily needs. While that might sound odd at first, let’s think of another story from John’s Gospel—the woman at the well. When Jesus tells her that he has a source of water that will never run dry and which will slake her thirst forever, her first response is to ask Jesus to give her that water. We should not blame her if she is taking him literally rather than metaphorically. She has to trek to the well nearly every day to get water with which to drink, cook, and wash. Imagine what a source of water that never runs dry would mean for her and how much easier her life would be. It is not hard to see why she jumps to that conclusion.

Likewise, in today’s reading from John we have a group of people who followed Jesus from one side of the Sea of Galilee to another in last week’s reading. There, without any food to speak of and no ready source of food other than the loaves and fishes that the boy brought, Jesus fed them abundantly.

Now they have followed him back across the sea and he tells them that he has bread that will fill them forever. Most of this crowd lives a subsistence life. Some days they don’t eat and other days they have no idea how they will get food to eat. If we were in their situation I expect when someone mentioned food that sustains a person forever, we would get excited about a literal bread of life, too. Think of how different their life would be if they did not have to worry about how to stay fed and alive.

So while other interpreters feel that the crowds are thickheaded or selfish, I understand why they are so literal. You and I on the other hand have the advantage of an abundant lifestyle. Most of us do not normally worry about where our next meal is coming from. It may be Raman noodles, canned soup or mac and cheese, but we will have something to eat today and tomorrow and the next day.

We are unlikely to get confused between a literal and metaphorical bread Jesus is offering to us. My question of you is, what does it mean to you when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry,

and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”? Let us sit in silence for a minute or so and then share what this statement of Jesus means to you in your life today. Let’s try to stay away from any theological explanation. Let us instead concentrate on what this means for you personally in your life today, this week, this month or this year.

[One minute of silence is timed.]

What comes to mind for you?

What I am hearing is that while we need bread or at least sustaining food for our bodies, as Jesus said in another gospel, “One does not live by bread alone.”<sup>1</sup> There is more to life than what we put in our mouths. There is more to life than just the physical act of living and then dying. What I hear is that Jesus offers us a richer life than one of mere existence or acquisition.

Jesus and God offer a life of richness with relationship to and through God. When we open ourselves to God we are able to experience life beyond the simple extremes of pain or pleasure. God offers a life of depth of spirit, love, companionship, joy, and contentment that transcends just existing.

We really live when we recognize that Jesus and God are in us and in other human beings. When we no longer see the other as an enemy but another child of God we are at peace. When we recognize that God has provided enough for all people we no longer live in fear of want, but in a life of abundance.

The bread that Jesus offers is truly nourishing for our hearts and our souls. It also helps us to endure life’s pains and to relish life’s joys in a way that moves us beyond, what Richard Rohr called our circumstances. That is that our life is not our present situation. We are not bound to what is happening in the moment because our life in Christ is more than that.<sup>2</sup> The bread of life whether it is God’s word, Jesus’ teaching, or the very bread of the Eucharist changes us into people that can live a life of joy, hope and peace regardless of our circumstances. The Bread of Life which is Jesus fills us with joy that is the life in Christ. It is a life of abundance for yesterday, today, and forever and ever.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:4

<sup>2</sup> I cannot remember where I heard or read this from Richard Rohr, but it has so affected me that it is one of my personal creeds.