

John 6: 35, 41 – 51 – Bread and Crumbs
Northminster / Newtonbrook United Church, August 9, 2009

The title of today's sermon is: "**Bread and Crumbs.**"

That is because Jesus said, "I am the bread of life,¹" and yet many of God's children live on nothing but crumbs.

For those who understand the Bible literally, this statement of Jesus – that he is the bread of life – must be a difficult thing to read. In my case, I understand that Jesus is using a metaphor – that is to say that he does not literally mean that he is a loaf of bread, but that Jesus is using something that is known in an attempt to illustrate something that is beyond our human understanding.

I understand Jesus as saying that his "way" nourishes us, and God's world, in a similar manner to that in which our physical bodies are nurtured by the bread that we eat. That's what a metaphor does.

If you do not agree that Jesus is speaking in metaphorical terms; if you believe that the Bible is literally true, word for word, then I'd like to know more about your interpretation of this statement. Let's talk. I'd like to know more about your beliefs.

Last week we spent some time reflecting on what was meant by the story of the crowds asking Jesus for yet another "sign" of who he is. This week Jesus points to bread as a "sign" of who he is, and who his followers are.

Helder Camara, at one time the Bishop of the Brazilian city of Recife, is often quoted as saying:

***"When I give bread to the poor,
they call me a saint.
When I ask why the poor have no food,
they call me a communist."***

Giving bread to others – through foodbanks, for example, is part of what Helder Camara is referring to. It is what we Christians do. It is a small part of helping our neighbours.

Other folks donate to foodbanks too because God has put good hearts into all of God's children. That's one sign of God's love for all of us.

However, for Christians, there are two profound reasons why we bring food to our church buildings – food that ends up on the tables of our neighbours, and their children, who are hungry.

¹ John 6: 35 NRSV

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- We do it because we are following the example, the way of Jesus. That's one reason.
- We also give bread to the hungry because of what Jesus said in Matthew 25: **when you give food to the hungry, you give it to me².**

This is a profound statement about how inter-connected we are as God's family here on earth. When we give to others, we are giving to the God who has given life to all of us, and to all of creation. Through doing what Jesus says, and following his example, we can understand God's intentions, God's will, God's hopes and dreams. Through Jesus we will not simply find nourishment for life now, we will find eternal life.

To know Jesus is to know God; to know Jesus is to have eternal life. What a wonderful gift!

Still, let's remember the second part of Camara's statement:

"when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist."

The Executive Director of Stop 103 here in Toronto is Nick Saul. He once said that;

"Charity is a double-edged sword that divides us."³

Charity means that people who are giving have the power to make a choice – they can share, or not. The recipient has very little power – they must accept what is offered.

Charity never fills the gap between those who have, and those who have not. Our society applauds those who share, as it ought to. Here in Canada we are too polite:

- to call people communist for asking why the gap between the rich and the poor is widening; Are we prepared to allow crumbs to some families, rather than bread for all?
- we are too polite to demand that the **Employment Insurance SCHEME** be fixed – and it is presently operating as a SCHEME where employees have to pay in, but not everyone can receive the benefits of their payments. Data released this week shows that the official unemployment rate here in Toronto is ten per cent. That's the "official" rate. Are we prepared to allow crumbs to some families, rather than bread for all?

² Matthew 25:35

³ Nick Saul, The Toronto Star, November 27, 2004

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- Pensions – we know that some people will retire with a “defined benefit” pension; some will have something smaller called a “defined contribution” pension; and some will have the crumbs of no employer pension at all. Are we prepared to allow crumbs to some families, rather than bread for all?

Karen Armstrong, a well known author, says:

“Religion is not what you believe, but how you behave.”⁴

Are we behaving as if we have a full loaf of bread – and we want everyone to have that also? OR, are we behaving as if the status quo is OK, those who have had their work taken from them in this economic recession can make do with the crumbs that fall from the table? Are we all in this together as God’s family, or not?

Even though we are bringing bread to the foodbank, even though we as Christians are feeding our sisters and brothers who are hungry – hungry children of God – are we questioning those who make decisions that cause divisions in this society:

- divisions between rich and poor:
- divisions between those who have bread, and those who have crumbs to feed their families.

I think that we need to remember the reason why the authorities – both Roman and Jewish – put Jesus on trial. It was NOT because he gave food to 5,000 people.

Jesus said, ***“I am the bread of life.”⁵*** Jesus offers us the opportunity not only to feed other children of God, but to challenge those who have a whole loaf while others have only crumbs. What kind of “sign” of the Kingdom are we to be?

We may want to be called saints,
but are we willing to be called something else?

#356 – Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

Proverbs 25: 21-22

*“If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;
for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,
and the Lord will reward you.”*

⁴ Karen Armstrong, The Toronto Star, September 30, 2006

⁵ John 6: 35 NRSV

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Prayers for God's Family and Creation

Loving God;
we try, as best we can, to live by bread alone,
or cake, or pie, or donuts.
And then we come to worship,
and you remind us that Jesus is the bread of life.
Our perspective changes; we are transformed
into being a part of your world-wide community
of humanity, and all creation.
We are not here for ourselves;
you call us to share, and to be here for others.

You God, are the Giver of all good things.
the Creator of day and night;
of rain and sunshine;
of summer heat and winter cold;
of bread and the energy of life.

We confess that we are often
take more than we need,
take from the poor to enhance our lifestyle;
take from others because we feel driven, or anxious.

Gracious God, may we turn our taking into giving.

We thank you for the bread that we have to eat,
and for the cake, and pie and donuts too.
All of these are a part of our privileged life
in this part of your creation.
While we munch on this bread,
give us ears to be better listeners;
give us patience to be a more accepting community;
give us openness to the ways of friends who we are meeting,
that we may all be a part of your Christian community.
This morning we pray for the family and friends of June McBey who died on
Wednesday; and for all whose names are written on our hearts.

we pray for the people of the United Church of Canada who are gathered in
Kelowna for the 40th General Council of our church.

We pray to you, God of love,
for in your presence there is forgiveness and hope. Amen.