

John chapter 6:35-51

Come and Taste, Jesus the Bread of Life

**I've been helped in this sermon by 'Addictions and Grace' a little book by Gerald May. The insights into what we were made for and how our hunger for the love of God and others can get twisted, as well as some insights into the quality of grace come from him. I have also used 'The People's New Testament Commentary by M.. Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock, and a talk given by William Willimon, called 'Wonder Bread'. It is available free on itunes.com*

John chapter 6 is often called the 'bread chapter'. Read it. You will see why.

Jesus feeds a great hungry crowd with a miracle of bread.

There is confusion about him because of it. Confusion about the bread.

Confusion about how his body is the bread. Confusion all around.

We will not read all 71 verses today. I hope you will do it yourself.

Let's listen to verses 25-35. (message based on verse 35)

Read

All human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure. It gives us meaning. It is a hunger to love, to be loved, and to move closer to the Source of love. p.1 (May)

We have an inborn desire for relationships of love. We need to know that we are loved. We need to give love and have our love received.

So what is that like? How do **you** experience it? Some say it is like a vacuum in the centre of our being. Others say it is like a God-shaped puzzle piece. Some call it a hunger that must be fed.

Vacuum, puzzle piece, hunger. It comes down to the same thing. We were made for relationships of love with God and each other.

God commands, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbour as yourself'.

God commands us to **live as we were made to live**. God commands us to step forward and trust him, to follow him into a life where that inner pressure is resolved, the puzzle pieces fall into place and our hearts are satisfied at last.

But here is the problem.

In our sinfulness we go looking for love in all the wrong places. We look for life in what is not life. We look for love in what cannot give us love. We give our worship and our undying loyalty and love to what is not worthy of us. We sell ourselves short.

We all like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his (or her) own way. (Isaiah 53)

That is, we have all tried, or we all try to meet our hunger for God in what cannot satisfy. When we do we develop these weird attachments to things. Most of them are pretty ordinary, necessary even for life. But our degree of attachment just gets weird. These things can take on total importance for us. They used to be called idols. Today they are called addictions.

The psychiatrist Gerald May (that is basically his list on the bulletin cover) <http://crcsa.org/BJan30.11.pdf> says that things get strange in two ways. We get really attached **to** things, (addictions of attraction) or **away** from things, (addictions of aversion) Now, **thinking only about yourself**, scan the cover for a few moments and notice which words jump out at you. Take some time. But think only for yourself.

Now, holding that word, or words for yourself, I'd like to give five signs that we may have tipped over into addiction territory.

That is, five signs that we are looking for God, looking for life in what cannot deliver.

(May)

Tolerance

Simply put, we need more. An addict to approval is never satisfied with a glowing compliment. He needs that strung up in lights.

Tolerance happens insidiously. When we are addicted to a physical substance our body makes adjustments by establishing a new balance. That means that the effect we are looking for takes more and more of the substance.

Withdrawal symptoms

When we try to stop the addictive behaviour there are two common types of reactions. The first is a stress reaction. When our body is deprived of something we are used to, it responds with danger signals. These can range from being just a bit uneasy to very agitated with rapid pulse, tremors, and a feeling of panic.

The second type of reaction is a rebound or backlash reaction. We experience symptoms that are the opposite of those caused by the addictive behaviour itself. Withdrawal from alcohol can produce a great rush of energy, even hyperactivity.

Self-deception

One of the nastiest traits of addiction is the way our own mind and will get caught up in a battle. Our creative brain power works to trick us into continuing the behaviour. We use denial, rationalization, displacement... every defense mechanism that psychoanalysis has identified. Basically, we will do anything to continue our addictive behaviour. Ever tried to stop something, and then were surprised to find yourself in that very activity?

Loss of willpower/freedom

An addiction, by definition is a loss of self-control over our own behaviour. Think back to the word or words you identified on the list. If you find yourself saying, 'I can handle it,' 'I can stop it any time I want', 'I can do without it', try a very basic test: Go ahead and stop. Do without it. If you can, say for three weeks, or maybe permanently, there is no addiction. If you cannot stop it is an addiction.

Distortion of Attention

Our addictions affect our ability to give, or pay attention and so they immediately affect our relationships.

Our addictions affect our love for God and our ability to receive and feel God's love.

Our addictions affect our awareness of others and our ability to receive and feel their love.

Our addictions affect our self-image. Self-hatred becomes part of the package.

We think we need our anger, we think we need our food, we think we need our shopping, we think we need our work, or our games or we cannot live. (Be careful if others challenge your behaviour and you say, 'this is just the way I am')

The bottom line is that the God-shaped vacuum becomes more and more intense, the puzzle piece more and more confusing and the hunger greater. We and those around us suffer many kinds of death.

Into all of this, into our hunger, into our distortion, our attachments and our aversions, Jesus says:

'I am the bread of life'.

His 'I am' is the 'I am' of **recognition**. After a very weird week in Alberta politics, we are all in a long wait to see who the next premier of Alberta will be. We know there will be one. We just don't know who it will be. One day, after the race, after the voting, someone will stand up and say, "I'm it". That is what Jesus is doing here. We know instinctively that there is some 'bread of life' out there, some food that will satisfy. Jesus says, "I am it". (cf Boring and Craddock)

"I am the **bread** of life". In that place and time, bread was a staple food. **We** don't really have staple foods. If the store is out of one thing, we can go to the next. A staple food is the one food that everyone eats every day. In Mexico, corn is a staple. If Jesus were 'hayzoos', he would say, 'I am the corn of life'.

If he were in Japan, Jesus would say, "I am the rice of life".

It's a metaphor. Jesus is saying, 'without me you will starve to death'. (Willimon)
'You need **me**, you need to feed on **me**, take me inside you and carry **me** with you everywhere you go'.

As he makes clear, 'eating Jesus' is trusting him, following him, bringing our hunger for love to him. I need to say to every one of you here today, '**you need to feed on Jesus**'. You can starve in a bakery if you refuse to eat. No one else can do this for you. You need to take and eat for yourself. Nor can anyone of us take and eat for anyone else. We cannot trust for another. If we try, we will only make things worse.

'I am the bread of life'. This is exclusive. It is not popular today, but the gospel testifies, the church confesses that there is no other bread, no other food but Jesus. No one else will satisfy. No other teacher has given his life for us, has dared to say, 'this bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world'.

Stop eating crap people. Feed on Jesus.

To stay with the metaphor, there are two 'special ingredients' in Jesus:

They are grace and faithfulness: (John 1:14)

Jesus is full of grace. Grace is the family love of God that flows out into and through creation in an endless self-offering of healing, love, illumination and reconciliation. (May) Grace is the love that forgives and frees us.

Grace **and** faithfulness. His grace cannot be exhausted. His mercy is new every morning.

Many years ago Annie Flint put it this way.

He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials He multiplies peace./

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

Remember, that as we 'feed' on what is not real food, we bring death to ourselves and those around us. As we chew on Jesus, as we trust in his grace and faithfulness, as we each turn away from our old nutrition, old idol, old addiction, Jesus brings us into life. He brings those around us into life.

One afternoon a short time ago, I had four conversations with four different people, and each conversation was about an addiction. The four people and their families were in four different places. But I am convinced that Jesus is at work among us, to feed us, to give us his free and new life.

On Wednesday this week I received this email from a friend. For years he looked like he was hopelessly stuck in his addiction. He looked like he would win the prize for most hopeless of all. He came to learn that God is not cruel and punishing, but full of grace and faithfulness. He came to taste the living bread. I spoke to him this morning and asked if I could share his email with you. I am glad I asked, because he also said that though he stands by what I will read to you, each day is still very difficult. He is hanging on to life, for dear life.

Listen, here is part of what he said in his email:

Pastor John, where does time go? Don't have a job yet, and life is so busy. Good friends though, are not forgotten. Have a new passion. Exploring options and have a new direction that God is leading me to. Inside it feels so right. What a great God who is able to give us direction. I have nothing to lose. Two years of sobriety, what a gift. I feel very blessed. A few things to entice your curiosity. I start school next month. Picture framing. Next week I will have two pieces of my work in two galleries.....

Jesus is the bread of life. Take and eat.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen