**A Sermon for DaySpring**

By Carroll Crowson

*“Food Is Love”*

John 6:35, 41-51

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Food is love. I can still hear my Aunt Laurie’s voice as she shared that sentiment in my mother’s kitchen. My son Jack was only 2 weeks and 2 days old when we learned the unexpected and devastating news that my father had died, so I created a sacred space, a sanctuary of sorts, in my parents’ bedroom to tend to Jack. The unexpected gift of creating a nest for our refuge in this part of the house meant that I had a special sight line. From my parents’ bedroom door, I could see the doorway where anyone coming in the backdoor entered the kitchen. It was a beautiful parade of provision not unlike a line of ants at a picnic, but in reverse. It was in these gifts of food that I did feel loved and I will never forget the image of this seemingly never-ending line of people who came to care for us. The people of God brought the food to nourish and sustain us when our hearts were raw and broken.

We do this here at Dayspring. When a baby is born we open up the meal train and sign up to nourish the bodies of those who are experiencing new life and the physical exhaustion that can accompany the joy. We show love by caring for these physical needs, so the soul tending can take place. For whether joyous or grievous life brings us moments where we find ourselves at the end of what we ourselves can do in that moment and so others extend themselves to stem the tide. Food is love.

When Jesus offers the first of 7 I am statements here in John’s gospel, he begins with the most basic and most necessary. I am the bread of life.

Jesus sustains us.

Bread is a beautiful thing. With just a few very simple ingredients, it becomes something completely other. Water, flour, yeast with a little salt and sugar yield a loaf of crusty bread, but it is not a quick and easy process. It takes time, it takes patience, it takes kneading. Bread like this cannot be rushed. In this very idea of bread, its process, I find so many lessons for my own life, especially the work that Christ is doing in my life.

When Jesus says he is the bread of life, everyone can identify with what he is saying. He was describing a key item in most every meal the people he was speaking to shared. They knew with familiarity the comfort and nourishment brought with that first bite to quell the growl in their stomachs. They knew how bread was able to satisfy their hunger and strengthen them on their journey and in their work, but the bread they knew would leave them wanting more in a few hours. Once the bread to which they were accustomed used up all it had to give, their bodies would signal that it was time to gather again for a meal, but what Jesus offers is new and different. Similar to his encounter with the woman at the well with water, here we see Jesus describing himself as bread that will continually sustain you. A miracle indeed, especially for those who may have been witness to and had their stomach filled by the Feeding of the Five Thousand experience described earlier in this same chapter of John. Were some of those present in the synagogue in Caperneum? Were there stomachs growling, pondering where is this bread? Earlier in the chapter they make known their desire by asking “what must we do to perform the works of God?” How can we get to this bread?

Jesus offers himself to all. And with that invitation comes a promise for everlasting provision and sustenance. Whoever comes to Christ, whoever believes will receive these gifts of abundance, both now and forever. We can take part in Jesus’ provision now and forever.

Jesus disrupts our expectations

Today’s passage carefully weaves in another bread story from an earlier time. The children of Israel wandering in the wilderness receive manna from heaven daily. This bread from heaven provided sustenance and nourishment for that day, but had to be renewed daily. It offered a beautiful picture of trust in God’s provision because if they tried to squander some away to save it for the next day, it would be a rotten, smelly experience. This new, living bread that Jesus offers is different from the manna, but a familiar response presents itself.

The Jews referenced in the passage are those insiders who have excluded others who follow Jesus from their circle. The same word for complaining that is used here is the same word to describe what the Israelites were doing during their desert wandering. Even after God provided manna, they complained of the manna and wanted meat. Here, these religious leaders are speaking out that Jesus cannot be who he says he is because they know where he comes from. How can this one who has grown up among us be the one to whom our prophecies point. How can he refer to God as Father? Jesus was clearly shaking up their expectation of what God’s redemption would look like. Were they afraid of losing their place in the religious order that they knew? Even in the face of hearing “I am the bread of life”, they clung to what they knew. But Jesus would not let this inner grumbling go without an address: “Do not complain among yourselves”. Jesus knows what the better response is and he will not let the complaining continue without an address.

Jesus calls us out from our sinful patterns and traps. Were the Jews feeling inadequate? Did they struggle to reconcile how this one among them could be God’s chosen? Did they have a sense of being less than or being entitled to their position, their knowledge? Do we do this too? Do we get so wrapped up in our sense of the order of things that we cling to the way we think it’s supposed to be instead of letting go and allowing God to speak into our lives his plan and his place for us. Jesus doesn’t want this for us. He wants us to release to him all of this anxious worries that keep us trapped in our own heads and let them go, so we can receive the bread of life he offers. It is in his giving that we are redeemed. Perhaps part of this redemption process is letting go of the things we cling, so tightly to, so we can have open hands to receive the abundance Jesus offers.

God initiates our rescue.

Earlier this summer, the world was united in a collective holding of our breath. Many of us followed the brave and valiant efforts to recover a football team of 12 boys and their coach who had entered a cave for a team building exercise. They were not prepared for the rainy season to make their exit near impossible and found themselves trapped within the cave. Part of the water rescue was so narrow that an adult could barely fit through a particular part of the cave, but miraculously over the course of days, the Thailand cave rescue was complete. One Thai navy seal did lose his life during the rescue efforts, bringing oxygen to others and he ran out of his own store.

The crowds want to know how to do the works of God – Jesus says in v. 29 this is the work of God, “to believe in the one he has sent”, meaning this work is what God can do. God give us the grace to believe. When we believe in Jesus, we respond to the gift of grace God has given us. It is not up to us, but God draws us to him. So with every kind word, every prayer of intercession, every outreach to on in need, and on and on. In everything we do that brings God’s light to the world, we are responding to the grace God has placed within us, to God’s work in each of us.

So as we remember Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on our behalf and line up down the center aisle of Dayspring to receive the bread and cup he so freely offers to all, we respond to the work of God in each of us. And once again, food is love.