

“Images of Jesus: I am the Bread of Life”

Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: April 7, 2024



I wonder if you — like me — have a favorite comfort food . . .

Maybe it is a Southern favorite like mac and cheese —
or maybe, it is something from your childhood.

Maybe it is dark chocolate (my personal favorite!) —
or, maybe it is a fast food item like a Chick-Fil-A sandwich or a Wendy’s frosty.

Whatever it might be, comfort food is a spring board to a deeper question that is being raised by our Scripture passages this morning.

That question is . . . where do we go for comfort when the hardness of life closes in?
Is there anything that can satisfy our souls when we are weary, feeling alone or are in pain?

In our Old Testament passage, God frames the question this way . . . “why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?”¹

In other words, God is asking , . . . why are you paying money for things that will not ultimately satisfy you, when I can offer you what you need and it is free?

It is only human to seek a reprieve from what is hard, to seek to satisfy ourselves with things other than God, but today’s two passages invite us back to a God who claims to have the ability to satisfy us when nothing else will.

It is intriguing in the Isaiah passage that God asks -
“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?”

To our modern ears, this doesn’t make a lot of sense . . . why is bread the right thing to buy?

It helps us to know that in Jesus’ day, bread was the essential component of every meal, and sometimes the only component, if one was poor.

In Jesus’ day, “it would have been unimaginable to sustain life [itself] apart from bread.”²

No bread, no life.

So perhaps — with that understanding — we are not surprised when Jesus uses bread as a way to explain who He is.

¹ Isaiah 55:2

² *Dictionary of Biblical Images, “Images of Jesus,”: 444.*

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“Just as it would be unimaginable to sustain life apart from bread, so too it is impossible to live a satisfying life apart from the spiritual sustenance provided by Jesus.”³

Remarkably, Jesus is both offering the ultimate comfort food and claiming to be that very food.

So how do we claim the comfort food that Jesus is offering?

First of all, we deepen our relationship with Jesus.

If we think about the food experiences that have been the most meaningful for us, I think we would agree that they are when we break bread with others.

Jesus is uniquely both the meal and the host of the meal.

When we go to Jesus as the bread of life, we go for nourishment, but we also go for relationship.

And there is a savoring of both.

Our time with Jesus is ideally relational rather than transactional. We both talk and listen. We both ask for help and offer gratitude when it comes. We both love and are loved in return.

Secondly, we make time for Jesus every day.

One of the most remarkable stories in the Old Testament is God’s provision of manna for God’s people. Manna is referred to as the “bread come down from heaven” because it was a bread-like substance that appeared each morning.

It was for God’s people, their daily bread, because it appeared each day, but it did not last beyond a day.

The manna provided nourishment but it also created a daily dependence on God as their host for daily bread.

Like the manna of long ago, Jesus is a gift from God for us and with us. There will never be anything more satisfying than a gift from God, that is God.

I have a friend who is experiencing a long ordeal with his eyes. He has had three procedures and more are ahead of him because of complications. He shared with me that his wife had asked if he ever cried out to God, “how long? how long?” He shared with me that while it is always okay to cry out to God, that had not been his experience. During these many months God had anchored him in God’s presence, God’s comfort, God’s peace, and God’s patience.

This friend admits that he largely lives in the present, but what I also know about this friend is that he makes time every day to be in God’s word and in God’s presence. I know that he seeks God’s bread daily.

Finally, we make enough time for God each day.

No food that we rush through is very comforting.

If mac and cheese is your “go to” but you bolt it down — you can be left with indigestion rather than comfort.

³ Ibid.

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If we want something to be meaningful and to satisfy, then there is an element of savoring it, of not rushing it, of not checking a box..

While it is true that fast food can be a comfort food, it is also true that it will not bring comfort if we eat it fast or eat it in the drive-thru lane.

We need to spend time with Jesus and not rush it.

I have experienced this firsthand. When I come to times of weariness and when I am in a place where I feel dry, it is often because I have been shortening my time with God and taking a drive-thru approach to our time together. I have not been creating the time I need for it to be truly nourishing and life-giving.

The more time we spend in relationship with Jesus, the more nourishing the meal that He provides in Himself.

One of my favorite verses in our New Testament reading is the crowd’s response to Jesus describing the way the Father gives the true bread of heaven which gives life to the world.

“Sir,” they say to Jesus, “may I have that bread always.”

May this also be our prayer as we journey through life.