

March 12 The Bread of Life

John 6:22-36

There is a difference between being full and being satisfied. The writer of our study book shares the following: “Have you ever had this experience? I was ready to go to bed one night but felt a little hungry. I wanted something to eat before calling it a night, but what would satisfy? I stared into the refrigerator. It was full of food, but nothing was appealing. I tried a piece of leftover chicken from supper the night before. It looked better than it tasted. I heated up a few bites of casserole. Again, same result. Maybe something sweet? I ate a little ice cream. That tasted better, but I still wanted something more. I finally went to bed feeling full, just not satisfied.” We understand there is a difference between these two ideas. Being full and being satisfied are not the same, yet we live in a world that would have us think they are. Being full, for the purpose of this sermon has more to it than eating. We are talking about all kinds of consumption. We are encouraged to consume more of just about everything. This, we are told, is the path to satisfaction. Deep inside we know this is wrong. There has to be some other way to find satisfaction than being driven by a need for more. Ultimately the need for more as a way of finding satisfaction is an unreachable goal. John D. Rockefeller, who was once considered the wealthiest man on the planet, was asked how much money was enough? He responded, “Just a little bit more.” Fullness does not guarantee satisfaction.

The drive to feel full characterized society in Jesus’ day also. That is the backstory to this first saying, “I am the Bread of Life.” The day before Jesus had performed a miracle of feeding thousands of hungry people by multiplying loaves and fishes. This is the only miracle story, except for the Resurrection, told in all four Gospels. The first three Gospels report that after everyone finished eating they were satisfied. John says they all ate and were full but it doesn’t say they were satisfied. That is a crucial difference and sets up this dialogue where Jesus proclaims “I am the bread of life.”

Following the miracle of multiplication, Jesus had sent the people home and the disciples in a boat on towards Capernaum. After spending time in prayer he walks on

the water to the disciples. The next day the people went looking for Jesus. When they did not find him near the place of the miracle of the feeding, they too got into boats and headed towards the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus knew why they came. He wasn't impressed that all these people were seeking him. They were not wanting to hear more about his message concerning the love of God. They were just looking for another miracle. They were driven by a need for fullness.

Therefore, Jesus told them that he could give something lasting and complete. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." He wanted them to focus on becoming satisfied. And Jesus knew satisfaction came in listening to and following his teachings. In response the crowd asked him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?" Think about that response for a moment. The crowd is fewer than twenty-four hours removed from a miracle and they are asking, "What can you do now?" That's the problem with chasing fullness. There is never enough. Not only that, it makes it hard to enjoy what we have. It makes us consumers instead of enjoyers!

Have you ever felt that a by-product of your faith should be a satisfaction that doesn't require much work? Have you ever said to God, "If you'll just give me this, I'll be so happy." Only to find out that the happiness expiration date on this was pretty short. When life becomes just a matter of chasing fullness, happiness is always temporary. There is always another need, another want, another crisis, another something that keeps us from being satisfied. C.S. Lewis said, "I sometimes wonder whether all pleasures are not substitutes for joy." Jesus in saying "I am the Bread of Life" in effect is telling us, "I don't want you to spend your life just chasing fullness. I want to offer satisfaction, no matter what the circumstances you are facing. I want to give you contentment and peace. I can provide that. Let me be your source of joy, so that no matter where you are, you can say, "Right now is a good day. Life is good. I am blessed."

I think this is something we all want. The question is, how to get to that place. The author suggests three things we can do, and I will add one more. The first of these is Fasting. Fasting is breaking from any routine or pattern for a given amount of time.

We often think about it only in terms of eating. We skip a meal; we give up some type of food for Lent. But fasting can be so much more. It can be stepping away from electronics, or a deliberate pattern of talking, like no negativity and so much more. We fast as a way of making room for other things. We fast so we can model new patterns of living that we hope might become permanent. Ultimately in fasting we deny ourselves so that our appetites don't consume us. We fast so we learn to be satisfied even when we are not full. It is working to achieve what the Apostle Paul said, "I have learned to be content in whatever situation I find myself." Fasting helps get you there because you are no longer only thinking about being full.

Secondly we are to move from "Expecting to Accepting" if we are to find satisfaction. We need to learn to accept what God puts in front of us each day. In my prayers I frequently like to tell God what I want. Real satisfaction comes when I pray differently. "Lord, thank you for what is set before me today. Help me to recognize and enjoy the special blessings you will offer me. I am going to choose to be thankful." Another way of saying this is to make being satisfied of higher importance than getting full. Getting full is something we can control. We are in charge of choosing. We can do the things that will fill life up, but satisfaction is something we need help with. We sometimes need assistance from God in order to say, "I have the gifts and opportunity to be satisfied right now. I already possess what is necessary for joy." What does it mean to believe that satisfaction is available each day? The author suggests this experiment. Each morning as you wake up, pretend it's Christmas Day. Remember as a child waking up with an excitement that made you feel like you were about to burst? Why did you have that feeling? Because you knew gifts were waiting to be discovered. How might it change you to begin each day believing that?

Did you wake up with eager anticipation for what today would bring? Or were you feeling like you were in a rut. It is Sunday, you get up, go to church, visit with friends, go out to lunch, go home take a nap, putter around the house the rest of the day. It is what always happens so why get excited? That way of looking at life will never lead to satisfaction. What, if on the other hand, you awoke with these thoughts: Wow! today I get to go to church. I can hardly wait to visit with my friends. I am so lucky to be able to

go out to lunch. I wonder what will happen this afternoon. With that kind of feeling, you are likely to be satisfied with your day, even more, feel blessed by it. This is what Jesus wants us to have.

Finally, he says that we need to focus more on feeding than on being fed. Seeking to live a redemptive life is not just about what we do for others. It is about what doing for others can do for us. Making an effort for others provides a satisfaction that can't be found when fullness is all we seek. We can all think about the warm feeling we get when we help someone out. It is then we really understand what it means to be satisfied.

The one I would add is: With God I have the power to say NO. This is different, in my mind from fasting. It is saying, "I have come to a place of decision. There are choices that feed what I want and there are things that provide what I need. I choose the latter joyfully." Once you begin to want satisfaction instead of being full you find it easier and easier to say no to the fullness side of life, the wants of living. Why? Because you know there is something better.

Today we heard a beautiful arrangement of *Amazing Grace* by Jackson Berkey. John Newton, the composer was, as most of you know, a captain of slave boats before he was converted. Even after his initial conversion he still captained such ships but finally left the sea and became a pastor and abolitionist. In verse four he writes "God has promised good to me" not God has promised to give me everything I want. He had lived a challenging and at times dark life. He thought of himself as that wretch who was saved by grace. He was satisfied with where he was. He didn't live long enough to see the effects of his transformed life. Here is a backstory. After many years serving a parish in Olney he took the position of rector at a London Parish. Many came to hear him preach. He was one of the more progressive preachers of his day. Among the young men who came to worship was a Member of Parliament, William Wilberforce. He was very discouraged at the time and was thinking about dropping out of politics. Newton said to him, "Be satisfied with where you are. Be faithful in what you can do. See how God might use you." These words caused Wilberforce to stay in Parliament. In a few short years his climb up the political ladder began and by the beginning of the

1800's he was Prime Minister. One of the major pieces of legislation during his tenure was the bill abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire. It was passed just two days before Wilberforce's death.

Today you are going to get some thumbs up sticky notes to take home. They are now the current symbol, emoticon, for satisfied. Put them some places you can see each day to remind you to not be happy with full but to seek satisfaction.

When Jesus is my bread of life, I can let go of that need to get all I can for myself and have life my way. I am free to give and share and enjoy. I can say to God, "Lord, you have already give me what I need for satisfaction, so I'm just going to enjoy it and look for ways to share it." Are you satisfied—or just trying to get full? How does your satisfaction overflow into giving to others?