

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“More than Metaphor”

John 6

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I'm going to ask you to think real hard with me for just a few minutes... to work and stretch yourself and then I'm going to ask you to let go of your thinking and receive.

We're about to come forward to this table and share in this mystery... It's a mystery and you can think on... about... a mystery, and that's okay. But you can't really get it... Reduce it to something your size. Shrink it to fit your categories. You let go and enter in and we'll do that.

We'll share in it but won't get it... anymore than the folks got it who were listening to Jesus talk about himself as bread that they had to eat.

It was confusing to the folks and weird... **“Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood.”** They didn't really get it and lots of them left because they just had to understand... The Thirsty Mind can't capture this, but think with me for a while, none-the-less.

John makes it clear, really throughout the gospel, that this story, this mystery... isn't easy to get. And Jesus never makes it easy... though he does offer explanation in John's gospel... where there is always an event being interpreted.

There's the event incarnation and John is telling you what it means and then, within the big event, there are these other events and John is always following up, usually with some conversation where we get in on the meaning of the event.

So, in chapter one, Jesus sees Nathaniel sitting under a tree... only Nathaniel isn't in sight, so this is a mystical seeing... But Jesus isn't showing off with a spiritual parlor trick, there's a meaning and it's all about what Nathaniel can come to see if he will follow Jesus.

Then there's the Wedding at Cana where Jesus turns the water into wine and again, there's more going on than Jesus saving the party. The best wine from ordinary water is the event, but there's a meaning and it's all about inner transformation.

Then he cleanses the temple... or better said, “dismantles” it... and true to form he interprets it. **“Tear this temple down and I will raise it again in three days.”**

And as is always the case in John, everyone is scratching their heads... **“Man it took us 46 years to build it... three days... right.”**

That's the pattern. An Event... Nicodemus, Mr. Ultimate Insider, for instance, comes to Jesus at night... Then Jesus explains what's taking place. **“You must be born again.”** And the explanation is misheard because Jesus is speaking at another level. **“Um, Jesus, I'm 70 years old... born again?”**

Jesus walks through Samaria, talks to a woman who's a real-live sinner, drinks her water and then tells her about a living water that will satisfy her everyday ... And she wants to know the address of the well... confusion.

That's the flow... event and meaning... and confusion around the mystery. Something happens and some meaning is offered but not completely perceived by folks, but there are some who share in it.

That's what happens in chapter six. There's an event, Jesus feed the 5000. People are everywhere and they're hungry and John says, **“Jesus knew what he was going to do.”** He's going to feed them... but it's not to wow them.

“This guy can make food... cool!” We know that's not Jesus' style. He shies away from the flashy stuff.

And he doesn't do this just to keep stomachs from growling while he's preaching. **“Listen to that, Fellas, don't you just feel sorry for them all... let's have a picnic, what d'ya say?”**

I suspect lots of folks had food with them. He could have sat down and said, **“Now, I want you all to share... Be nice. C’mon, I see that basket of figs. C’mon feel the love.”**

No... this is an incarnational moment... an event designed to reveal something. That’s what all the events are about as John lays them out. Jesus takes and blesses and breaks and gives the bread and it just keeps on going and going and going. **“Take one down, pass it around”** and it doesn’t stop.

It’s abundant...

It’s complete...

It’s eternal.

That’s the event and then all the conversation and teaching afterwards is about revealing the meaning of what took place... Confusing and mysterious, it is.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry or thirsty. I am!!!” It’s one of John’s favorite phrases... **“I am... ego eimi.”** A little thing he picked up from the Old Testament. Remember when Moses asks for a name in the desert.

“I’ll need a name, God... I can’t just go tell Pharaoh to let all the slaves go without a name for our God.”

Remember what he says, **“Just tell them I Am.”** It’s like God’s saying, **“Who am I? You want a name? Tell them Being sent you... that’s with a capital ‘B’, Moses... Yeah, just tell them that your God is existence itself, that ought to do.”**

“I am, ego eimi” in the Greek and John records it 25 times. **“I am the light... the door... the good shepherd... the vine... I am the bread of life.”**

Remember John’s gospel is about the meaning of The Event... In Jesus, is the great I Am... Being itself... The Life that is the Life of God and it’s in Jesus Christ and it is the food we need. Keep thinking!

We’re created for it... and at the deepest levels we will go hungry without it. It’s the only thing that can really sustain us. That which is eternal within us (and it is there...) can only be sustained by the Eternal. This bread comes down from heaven. The sustenance from the Infinite Realm.

Other things may satisfy... some... like that manna they got out in the desert a long time ago...like that law Moses gave them... but not eternally. To have life, you have to ingest Life. You have to take this into yourself. This reality... this being of God.

Remember I said we had to think for a while... **THINK NOW... WORK WITH ME.** When you take a bite of bread... a bite of anything... it’s nature, what it is, becomes a part of you and changes you. It’s ingested... digested... And there’s no getting it back... it’s pretty much in there. Participating with us and us with it.

“I am the bread of life.” My Being is the bread of life.

You have to feed on me.

You have to take the life of God into you.

Jesus didn’t say, **“I am a great idea... and verily, verily, whoever will think the right things about me will live.”** No, **“Ingest me... the life of God.”** And at the end of our text he doesn’t just say eat... it’s more like “crunch and munch... really chew and chew hard,” is what the Greek says.

So, that’s the event... and there’s the explanation... at least the way one part of the Church interpreted along the way. **“Jesus is speaking metaphorically.”** He is... metaphorically speaking... a door, a vine, bread... Of course, we know that another part of the church... said **“Well, yes, but... there’s more than metaphor taking place here... This is sacramental. It’s mystery. Jesus is... John is... instituting a practice for the church whereby we get something from God... LIFE, from the Bread of Life.”**

And Protestants, especially Baptist, said, **“No, I don’t think so.”** Mostly, I think reacting to a kind of superstitious handling of this idea. And it was and can be that way... Just like any ritual, it can be reduced to infantile hocus-pocus. Say the right incantation... bow just so... and win a free pass to the Pearly Gates. That’s an immature faith.

All forms are subject to that... especially if they’ve been meaningful. The latest form is usually the next idol. We all do it; we always start substituting the form for the substance. It happened throughout history... it happens everyday.

Usually, the last great experience we had with God becomes the next hurdle (Richard Rohr)... In our immaturity we cling and try to recreate. What is holy gets shrunk... what is manageable and the holy isn’t manageable.

And when we see people trying to manage it... as we’ve seen it... we react, don’t we... and you know what we do??? What we did??? We threw the form baby out with the immature bath water. Paul hit on this when he said, **“circumcision isn’t the point (form)... but neither is uncircumcision.”** Formlessness isn’t the point... being a new creation is.

Are you still thinking... hang with me. Biblical faith is about form. The story is... what is formless, takes form. What is unseen, becomes expressed in what is seen. The Eternal is now in the Temporal. The infinite incarnates the finite. The Divine is at the heart of the human... Uncreated as the created.

So... in our faith... everything bears God. The Psalmist says, **“All creation is telling the glory... the presence of God.”** The life of God is in all things. If that sounds new age... trust me it’s not. If something exists... it exists because of the life of God. These rocks exist... and remember your 9th grade science... there’s life – movement – energy within them.

There is one Life... one source.

It is flowing in... creating... sustaining all things.

These rocks... those trees...

Every color... every creature...

You... me... every neighbor and every enemy.

That’s Biblical faith. I’m not a heretic... Don’t burn me at the stake, because later you’ll realize I was right and be thinking... **“Man, we shouldn’t have burnt our pastor.”**

Remember Paul’s poetry in Colossians. **“Nothing exists apart from him... In him all things were created. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.”**

Our religion is actually very material. It celebrates the material. Not materialism... but creation... Because the Uncreated is present in it.

Still thinking?

It’s like this... I do a lot of home improvement and someday, after I’m gone, my kids might be in that house looking around and saying, **“Gosh... it’s like dad is here”** and that’d be true... They could see my handiwork. But what would be even more true and more like God and God’s world is if they said, **“Dad is here... this place is haunted...”**

That’s God and God’s world... God is in it all.

So... God does not send a memo. “F.Y.I. – I ♥ you!”... God sends a son. There’s a conception... a body in a body. A pregnancy and the water breaks... it’s messy and bloody and... it’s beautiful.

There’s a baby... a boy...

There’s a life... there’s a death.

It’s messy... it’s horribly bloody... it’s beautiful.

And God is in it all. It’s a material... fleshy... story. It’s not that there’s God and what’s spiritual and there’s the material and it’s something lesser we have to put up with. It’s all spiritual... It’s all holy.

The meaning of Life is in Life, in the event. It's everywhere and all around us...
Still thinking? Think with me.

Why should we be shocked when we hear Jesus... hear his apostles... and the church say, **“He’s in the bread.”** He was in the crucifixion. He was in Mary. He’s in us... we say. ... In every sunset and every meal... Why not this one? Why not this one, especially? We see the unseen in what is seen. We share in it.

We take in what is eternal... So... this wonderful metaphorical teaching can be something more because in this holy case, the metaphor participates in the reality to which it points. Think with me. It doesn't just point... It participates.

When Jesus said, **“Do this in remembrance...”** remembrance is not the best translation as in ‘Hey, don’t forget’... It’s really more like “make present.” “Let it be real.” Re-member it... put it back together.

Keep thinking... This metaphor is a meal and a meal that bears witness to a greater reality. There is a seed. It falls ...empties... dies... grows up. It’s picked and crushed and baked... transformed. It’s broken... It’s offered. There’s a grape... fruit that falls is crushed and fermented. Transformed... poured out... offered. This meal participates in the reality it re members. God emptied... God broken... God offered.

Now... STOP... stop thinking.

You can’t understand finally. But you can participate. No more left-brain work. Only right-brain imagination.

Receive...

Enter...

Don’t think...

It’s time to leap. There is one body offered... and one body created. ... And one bread that feeds... that feeds us all. And there is one faith, one baptism, one Lord who is above all and in all and through all... all in need... all being offered the bread of life and the cup of salvation. Take all of it.