

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, August 4, 2024  
"Life-Giving Bread"

## *Young at Heart Message*

Let's start today's message by trying to put ourselves into the story we are hearing today.

Let's imagine for a moment that we are part of the crowd that is following Jesus around.

Yesterday, we witnessed a miracle.

There wasn't enough food, and yet somehow, we were all fed.

We are used to going hungry more often than we would like.

Illness, hunger, and unsanitary living conditions lead to some level of misery for most of us, at least some of the time.

Life in this age can be a burden at times.

Shelter, food, safety, and security can be a struggle for many of us.

Life is uncertain in so many ways, and most of us are looking for miracles or solutions to these daily burdens that plague our lives.

Yesterday, we all sat together and watched as this man, Jesus, turned a few loaves of bread and two small fish into enough food for all of us.

We ate well for the first time in a long time, and the best part was that we didn't have to do the work of gathering or preparing the meal.

Anyone who can provide food in such a way should absolutely be our king.

And yet, when we expressed our desire for this man, Jesus, to be our king, he left us and declined to accept this honour.

Perhaps he was just being humble and modest. A man like that who can work such miracles is probably a humble man at heart.

So today, we searched long and hard and we found him again!

He was able to feed us yesterday, but who knows what else he can do!

What would you want to ask Jesus if you were part of this crowd who searched so hard to find him?

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What would you want Jesus to know about how you live and what your needs are?

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How do you feel about meeting Jesus again today?

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I imagine that this crowd feels a mixture of wonder, excitement, anticipation, and hope as they encounter Jesus again.

They ask him a seemingly innocent question: "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

But instead of giving them an answer they might expect, Jesus seems to chastise them.

He says, more or less, "You worked all night to find me because I represent a free lunch. You never read the signs; you missed the point completely."

Putting ourselves back into the crowd for a moment, how does it feel to have Jesus call us out for having "insufficient reasons" for trying to find him again?

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### ***The Message***

I imagine that the people in the crowd were confused and perhaps even angry at Jesus' response, at least initially.

They felt like they were doing the right thing, not only for themselves, but also for someone who had clear leadership skills and, they assumed, should be honoured that they wanted him to be their king.

The question they asked him implies that they know something about Jesus, but they desire to know so much more.

Their question is not limited to time and place. Rather, it's a question about ultimate origins.

They want to know where he came from and how he became a miracle worker.

So Jesus' response to their seemingly innocent question feels rather harsh.

Although the people have been searching for him all night long, and even crossed the lake to find him, Jesus detects an ulterior motive and calls their bluff (even if *they* don't know it's a bluff).

Most of us are afraid to be this forthright.

How many of us have had friends, family members, or acquaintances ask us for something or do something with seemingly good intentions, but we know they have a different agenda all together?

And yet, it is rare that we call people out so bluntly.

Many of us, myself included, will even allow the person to take advantage of us or work their agenda knowing that's what they are doing because that's easier than calling them on it.

But Jesus does something that is ultimately more meaningful and useful to the crowd than simply going along with their misguided agenda would have been.

He essentially tells that that he knows why they've come to find him.

"You came after me because of what happened yesterday when it was time to eat. You ate your fill, and now you've come to see if you can get more out of me today. You aren't really interested in knowing who I am. Your question is a façade to cover your true intentions."

Ouch.

More or less what he is saying is that they have come looking for him for what I would say is "insufficient reasons."

I hesitate to say "for the wrong reasons" because they are just doing what instinct, cultural norms and expectations, and their own survival skills tell them they should do.

They aren't *trying* to do the wrong thing here.

But their reasons are insufficient, and Jesus is pressing them to go deeper than their surface-level agenda.

And this shouldn't really be surprising to us today.

People have, throughout history, chosen "insufficient reasons" to follow Jesus.

The cause of Christ has been exploited in myriad ways over the course of history to either hurt people, or to further people's political or personal agendas that have nothing to do with Christ.

But Jesus isn't having it, and if he were here today, I imagine his response would be very similar, or perhaps he would have even more harsh words for us today.

He abhors such crass opportunism.

In this case, he doesn't even answer the question they ask him, but instead he moves the conversation in a new direction.

"The bread you're after," he tells them, "will not last. Yesterday you assuaged your hunger. You ate the bread and now you're hungry again. There is food that perishes and there is food that lasts. God the Father has marked me to provide you the food that endures. So work for *that* food."

In other words, your focus on things that are fleeting in this life will keep you on the hamster wheel. Jesus is inviting them (and us) to step off the hamster wheel into a new life.

How do we do that?

Jesus tells the crowd that the answer is simple: "Believe in him whom he has sent."

So easy! Right?

Well, the crowd doesn't think so, and they ask him to prove it.

We heard a similar story from Exodus today as well – the very same story the crowd mentions as sufficient "proof."

Jesus reminds them that Moses isn't the one who provided the manna – that manna came from God.

Like most of the people in this crowd, each of us here is challenged by at least one personal "wilderness:" painful loss, physical suffering, financial woes, betrayal, bereavement, and more.

These are roads that we travel not by choice, but by necessity.

With the life-sustaining bread that Jesus offers, we are able to walk these roads.

It doesn't mean it will be easy.

He doesn't promise the crowd that all of their troubles will disappear.

He's promising something deeper, something that will sustain us *through* the challenges and burdens of life – not something that will allow us to bypass those challenges completely.

Jesus is offering us an opportunity to see past whatever “insufficient reasons” we have for seeking him, and instead recognize that our own agenda needs to be set aside in order to truly be fed by the Bread of Life.

This is the Good News that the Gospel of John is trying to convey – it's simultaneously a reality check that allows us to look at ourselves and our selfish motivations, and also set those aside so that we can come to Jesus with more intention and deeper meaning.

May we each take this opportunity to grow more deeply into our relationship with Christ and may we look beyond ourselves to the love and sustenance that Jesus provides through, for, and with God the Father. Amen.

Let us pray:

God, we sometimes have insufficient reasons for following you - sometimes we hope for answers, want you to do the hard work for us, or expect you to clear our path of obstacles or challenges without us having to do any of the hard work ourselves.

We sometimes forget to be grateful for those times when life gets difficult and you continue to love and support us through the challenges.

Thank you for loving us and guiding us, teaching us and being patient with us.

We know we don't even have to ask, but we pray that you continue loving us and supporting us throughout our lives.

All of this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Resources:

~ Commentary from Christian Century titled “Wonder Bread: John 6:24-35” by Charles Hoffman (2006):

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2006-07/wonder-bread>

~ Commentary from Working Preacher titled “Commentary on John 6:24-35” by Alicia D. Myers (2024):

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-18-2/commentary-on-john-61-21-7>