

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla  
**Scripture:** John 6:25-35

*When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves."<sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."<sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."<sup>30</sup> So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?"<sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven."<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which[a] comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."<sup>34</sup> They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."*

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

A lady was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store, but couldn't find one big enough for her family. She asked a stock boy, "Do these turkeys get any bigger?" The stock boy replied, "No ma'am, they're dead."

It's that time of year again—turkey time. Last weekend, Don and I went to claim our free turkey at Martin's. We looked for the biggest one we could find in the freezer case, and we found one that was nineteen-and-a-half pounds. Perfect! We took it home and put it in the refrigerator to thaw. Don got it out later in the week and began soaking it in a brine; and on Friday he put it on the smoker. It smelled delicious as it slowly cooked most of the day.

After worship today, we will go home to get it and some other goodies and leave for his sister's place in Ephrata, PA where we will celebrate Thanksgiving with the Rowe family. Everyone brings something to the dinner. We were asked to bring salad and one of the two turkeys, which is why Don prepared the turkey.

There is always more than enough food and yes, we all stuff ourselves as we enjoy the special Thanksgiving treats. After finishing up with our desserts, many of us are too stuffed—more than satisfied—to leave the table, so we just sit there and enjoy one another's company; or we find a comfortable seat in the family room and watch football.

The eating frenzy doesn't end with the completion of that delightful meal. Everyone will get hungry again, or at the very least will get the munchies. So, snack foods, maybe even some of that delicious leftover turkey will sit on the kitchen counter for all of us to pick at all day long. What a wonderful tradition!

Eating is something every human being needs to do in order to survive. We may feel satisfied for a while after eating a meal or a snack, but we get hungry again, don't we? We need to eat to survive! Likewise, we learn from today's scripture reading that we need spiritual food to survive too.

The events in today's scripture reading take place shortly after a miraculous time when Jesus fed 5,000 men, plus the women and children gathered around him and his disciples. The crowd was there to hear Jesus teach. The time came when Jesus knew the people needed

something to eat, so he sent his disciples out to see what food they could find among the people, to use to feed the people.

The disciples returned with a meager two fish and five barley loaves. Jesus took the food, blessed it, and somehow produced enough food from what was before him to feed everyone until they were full, and there were leftovers. It was a Thanksgiving feast out on the hillside enjoyed along with the company of friends, family, and strangers.

At the conclusion of the day, the disciples got into one of two boats along the shore and set off across the lake for Capernaum. Jesus was not with them. It was dark and the wind was strong. Suddenly, the disciples noticed something coming towards them. It was Jesus, and he was walking on the water. Wow! Imagine seeing that sight! Soon after this, they all arrived on the other side of the lake.

We learn then that on the next day, the crowd that was still gathered on the side of the lake where Jesus fed them, knowing the Jesus had not gotten in the boat with the disciples when they set-off for the other side of the lake, discovered that only one boat was missing, and so they assumed Jesus was still nearby. But when they could not find him, they began to wonder where Jesus was. Other boats arrived on the shore where the people were lingering. Some of the people got on board the boats and took a ride to Capernaum in hopes of finding Jesus again. And indeed, they did find him. When they found him, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus ignored their question. The scriptures tell us that Jesus, aware of the limited time he had with them, used the time to teach the people again. Surely, he knew they were hungry, again, and wanted something to eat. Building then, on their experience with him from the day before and their needs at that moment; he began to teach them about satisfying a greater need than their physical hunger...and that would be the need to satisfy their spiritual hunger.

He reminds them that they saw something rather remarkable happen the day before when he miraculously fed them all, using just two fish and five barley loaves. He criticizes them for not recognizing God as the giver of that food, perhaps not even offering thanks to God for the food. Instead, they were focused on the bread itself and their desire for more.

They compared that moment to the days their ancestors were fed manna while they were in the wilderness, giving Moses the credit for feeding them. Jesus corrected them, telling them that God provided the manna not Moses. In the same way, God provided the food the day before and they didn't acknowledge that either. It's as if Jesus was saying to them, "You cannot think about your souls for thinking of your stomachs."

This made me think of our dog, Royce. On Friday, as I took my lunch break with Don. Royce sat by us at the table as he often does unless we make him lay down elsewhere. He was just sitting there watching Don eat his apple, and as often is the case, Royce was drooling. He really wanted a bite of Don's apple, and he got lucky as Don took a bite and gave it to Royce. But it was obvious that, that one bite was not enough to satisfy his desire. Royce stared at the apple, and drooled more. In the end, Don gave Royce the core of the apple, and he was then content for the time being, simply because the reality was that there was no more food to be had. As a dog, he would only focus on feeding his stomach, whether it was full or not, he thought nothing of the giver, he just wanted the food.

It's different for us as humans, yet we too can get so focused on our immediate needs and desires and miss what is really. Jesus wanted the people, and Jesus invites us to think about more than finding instant personal gratification. Through this text Jesus invites us to consider this question: What are we hungry for and how can that hunger be satisfied? When considering this

question, we need to hear Jesus addressing two kinds of hunger. There is physical hunger which food can satisfy; but there is a spiritual hunger which that same kind of food cannot satisfy.

If we dissect this concept of physical hunger, we have to admit that it's not always food we seek to satisfy us. Our desires for other things can get pretty strong, almost to the point where we think we cannot live without what we desire. This too is a type of hunger.

This hunger is often related to material things. Let me offer this personal example of this kind of hunger that plagues me. I absolutely dislike our refrigerator in our kitchen. We left behind a wonderful fridge at our old house after only owning it for a little over a year. Our current fridge is an apartment sized fridge which had a middle shelf that allowed things to fall down to the shelf below from the back of it, (I say had because we did figure out how to fix that problem, Yay!), and it does not have an ice maker.

The problem is that we cannot find a refrigerator that will fit into the current space allotted for the fridge in the kitchen. Making the space big enough would require significant work. Now, the reality is, I don't need a new refrigerator. We already have two refrigerators, in fact, one in the kitchen and one in the basement. But I want one. Whenever I get the chance when we are in a store that sells refrigerators, I check them out and hope that I will find one, with an ice maker, and that is a little wider, that will fit in that space. It's a desire, not a need. And the reality is that should I be able to satisfy this desire, another foolish want would arise from the dust of this old desire, and the battle would begin all over again.

But physical hunger is not only related to eating food and to wanting material wants. Physical hunger can involve desires for power and for excitement in our lives. We might feel inner pangs of desire, more than hunger, which cannot ever be fully satisfied. Just when we think we've obtained the recognition we seek or fulfilled our need for a specific pleasure, we often discover ourselves wanting more. People end up bouncing from one thrill to the next, but never really finding satisfaction.

Then there is spiritual hunger that Jesus mentions. And unfortunately, some people misconstrue the spiritual emptiness they feel inside, and think they can fill it with the kinds of things I've previously mentioned, and they find that it just doesn't work! This is exactly what Jesus was accusing many of those gathered around him that day of doing. Jesus tells them, he tells us, that only he can satisfy our spiritual hunger. He is the bread of life, **sent by God**, to satisfy our hunger.

As we seek Jesus, grow our faith in him and trust him, our spirits partake of this amazing bread, and we find souls being filled and satisfied. Jesus tells us that this bread offered to us through Jesus is God's unconditional love and peace poured over on us, God's faithfulness to us that can help us to get through any and everything, and God's promise of everlasting life to those who are faithful to him.

As we give thanks, partake of the Bread of Life and are satisfied, we find that the things that worry us, our insecurities, and the fears that haunt us lose their power over us as we focus less on them and more on Jesus, who strengthens and guides us. We stop reaching for temporary and meaningless gratifications that in the end only leave us with a feeling of a deeper inner emptiness and a stronger longing for something more.

Only Jesus can satisfy all of our spiritual hunger. When you feel that inner emptiness, that hunger for some kind of nourishment, to fill whatever is missing or stirring the pot and making life uncomfortable, turn to Jesus. Make it your daily intention, even when it involves risk, to walk each day with him. Focus on his goodness, digest and follow his example, feast on his teachings, accept his forgiveness and stop beating yourself up for your sins; and relish in his

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unconditional love, **do something, do something,** to draw you towards him, **give yourself a fighting chance** to connect with him and be fed. Leave behind whatever stops you from reaching for him, your doubts, distractions, even laziness, leave it behind. Get up to the table, feast on him, the Everlasting and Satisfying Bread of Life.

May your Thanksgiving feast, satisfy your physical hunger; but may it also remind you that your spiritual hunger can only be satisfied by Jesus. As you give thanks for the food you are about to eat, may you also give thanks for your walk with Jesus, citing his presence and guidance with you on the journey, and offering gratitude for the many blessings that come from him, focusing not as much on the physical gratifications he gives, but ever-so-much-more importantly the spiritual nourishment he gives to satisfy your soul.

A theology professor at a Southern seminary, a master at brief, memorable sayings, uses this table blessing at meals, "Lord, I thank you for food: food for the body and food for the soul: may we never lack for either and give us an appetite for both!" May this be our prayer offered this Thanksgiving and every day. Amen.