

August 2, 2015 10th Sunday After Pentecost John 6:24-35

My one friend from seminary, Dave Von Schlicten, used to say, "Bread is the pallet upon which you build your sandwich." It's a bit of a silly saying, but I think it will take us miles in today's sermon. We're in what is called the Bread of Life discourse from the 6th chapter of John. We'll be reading from it for the next few weeks. In it Jesus gives a deep and rich description of himself and a relationship with God. However, it is all very heady and not easy to preach upon. We started getting into it last week; and after worship my kids, who I can always depend upon for fair feedback about a sermon, told me my sermon wasn't exactly bad, but it was boring.

So, Jesus is the Bread of Life - a wonderful image, but difficult to elaborate upon in any way that isn't all too heady. But, if Jesus is the bread to build the sandwich of your life upon now we can go somewhere.

If Jesus is the Bread of Life, what kind of bread would he be? He can do all sorts of miracles and great things. How about if we liken him to Wonder Bread? No, with all respect due to the people who make Wonder Bread, it doesn't cut it as an image for Jesus. I know they make a variety of Wonder Bread,

some of which is supposed to be better than others, but Wonder Bread is the whitest bread that ever there was. It's made from wheat that's been bleached and refined. While it might be white and fluffy, it also has no substance. When you eat Wonder Bread what happens? It goes into your stomach, it quickly turns to sugar and while you may get a boost of energy from it for a short time, most of it will end up hanging around on your waist for a long time.

I think the crowds following Jesus saw him as a Wonder Bread sort of guy. You'll remember last week we had the Feeding of the 5000. Jesus miraculously feeds a huge crowd with only five loaves of bread and two fish. They are amazed, and even though he tries to get away, they keep following him; hounding him more like. In today's gospel reading we find them again with Jesus and they're asking for signs and miracles - as if the miraculous feeding wasn't enough for them to believe.

But indeed it wasn't. While their bellies were full for a few hours, they didn't get any real spiritual nourishment from it. And now they want more. What would happen if Jesus gave them more? They'd just want more again. On and on it would go. If Jesus fell into doing what they wanted he would have been

nothing more than a divine enabler of human laziness. That would be a Wonder Bread Jesus.

No, if Jesus is the Bread of Life then we'd better envision a hearty loaf of multi-grain bread. You know the kind - not the stuff you find in the bread aisle of a grocery store, but the stuff you have to buy at a bakery, or at least the bakery department of a grocery store. The type of loaf that is heavy enough that if you lift it takes some effort to lift it. It makes a thud sound when you drop it on a cutting board. It is dense. It is dark in color. It is made of whole grains and maybe multiple grains - wheat, barley, oats, rye, and maybe more.

This type of bread is filling, but it also carries a lot of nutrients. Did you ever make little dough balls by smashing white bread down and rolling it? It takes like a whole slice to make a small ball. But if you try to make a ball with whole grain bread it doesn't take much of a slice at all.

Strong, hearty, solid; this is the kind of bread Jesus is. And if it is to be the palette for a sandwich, then let's see what a sandwich looks like.

Is there any right or wrong way to make a sandwich? Not really. And is there any limit to what you can do with a sandwich? You can do meats and cheeses, lettuce and vegetables, then add a little dressing. The ingredients can be hot or cold. The bread can be fresh or toasted. You can do eggs, mayonnaise based salads. You can do hamburgers. You can do BLT's. And of course there is always everyone's favorite: peanut butter and jelly. Everyone loves peanut butter and jelly. Kids, don't ever believe an adult who pretends to have outgrown their love of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Inside there is still a kid who gets a giggle of delight when they take the first bite. I feel sorry for people who peanut allergies who can't have peanut butter.

You can have open faced sandwiches, closed sandwiches, and sandwiches with multiple layers of bread like Dagwood Bumstead.

If Jesus is the Bread of Life, then you can build your life's sandwich in countless ways; the ingredients you put on being your education, your job, your spouse, your kids, adventures and experiences, your likes and dislikes. It is an expression of yourself. The only real rule is that you want to build your life in a way that honors its foundation - the hearty, strong and healthy bread of life that is Jesus. There's

really no place for destructive, hurtful and exploitative things.

Now, is it possible to make a sandwich without bread? I suppose you can do it. You could use a slice of lettuce to replace the bread and hold it all together, or maybe something else. But it'll be messy.

Just imagine what an ever-loveable peanut butter and jelly sandwich would be like without any bread? It would be a mess! How could you eat it? I suppose you could just dip your fingers into the jar of peanut butter and the jar of jelly and just lick it off. It just doesn't work!

All around us are people trying to make life sandwiches without the Bread of Life, and the results are a mess. Or maybe they're trying to substitute flimsy Wonder Bread for something substantive. Everything fast, easy and slick is the Wonder Bread substitute. And it just leads to wanting more. When I consider the amount of consumption I see in people's lives all around me I think of the diet of junk bread they are trying to build their lives upon.

Jesus, the solid, hearty Bread of Life is not easy, fast or slick. But he is substantial. He satisfies for the long term. He is what we need for today and tomorrow. He is what others need as well.

We do well to share the Bread of Life with others who do not have it. Oh, they're really addicted to their Wonder Bread way of life and don't want to try really good bread. So selling it isn't always easy. But if we keep at it, and even quietly witness to the foundation of our lives by showing contentment and wholeness, they will notice.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Take and eat. You may build upon it in countless ways, all of them to the glory of God and for the nourishment of others. May you always find wholeness with your Lord. Amen