

**Wonder Bread**  
John 6:1-15  
Sermon by Mark Schloneger  
July 25, 2021

Jesus has just answered angry religious leaders  
who had confronted him  
for healing a man on the Sabbath.

*Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near.*

*When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*

*Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"*

*Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"*

*Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.*

*When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.*

*After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:1-15, NRSV)*

I want you to imagine that all of us who have gathered here this morning  
represent the entire world's population.

Now, I need fourteen people to stand up.

If our attendance today is similar to previous Sundays,  
the people standing up represent  
the people who went to bed hungry last night.

According to the World Food Programme,  
811 million people in the world are undernourished.

That's one person out of ten.

One in ten is chronically hungry, right now.

One in ten.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/stories/hunger-pandemic-food-security-report-confirms-wfps-worst-fears>

After a decade of significant progress,  
more people slid into chronic hunger in 2020  
than in the previous five years combined.

This is attributed to conflicts, climate change, and Covid-19.<sup>2</sup>  
And in case we think that hunger is only a problem in far-off places,  
one in six American children live in a state of food insecurity,  
meaning that they don't know where their next meal will come from.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus said to Philip, "Where are to buy bread of all these people?"

You can be seated.

According to the federal Food & Drug Association,  
the United States wastes between thirty to forty percent of its food supply.  
This figure corresponds to approximately 133 billion pounds  
and 161 billion dollars' worth of food.

Wasted food is the single largest category of material  
placed in municipal landfills.<sup>4</sup>

Now, unlike what some of us have been told,  
eating all that's on our plates  
will not feed all the hungry people around the world.

Yet, when you compare the world's hunger rate  
with our nation's rate of food waste,  
you begin to see people struggling  
on two sides of the same anxious coin --  
a coin inscribed not with "In God We Trust",  
but with "Will God Provide"?

One group struggles with knowing the answer,  
while the other group makes absolutely certain  
that they never need to ask the question.

"Will God provide?"

The people of Israel became slaves in Egypt over their need for food.  
There was a famine in the land, and Pharaoh used his power to control the food.  
First, the children of Israel gave up their land to Pharaoh in exchange for food.  
The next year, they gave up their cattle to Pharaoh in exchange for food.  
In the third year, they had no collateral but themselves.  
And so they exchanged themselves, their labor, in exchange for food.  
It was a transaction that we understand very well.  
Food is a commodity to be bought, controlled and sold.

After God liberated the Israelites from Egyptian slavery,  
they understandably had a hard time letting go of the lesson  
that had been reinforced to them for generations:  
that is, food is a scarce resource and is obtained only in return  
for their property or their labor.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.feedthechildren.org>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste>

And so, in the wilderness,  
they were asking the questions that one in ten asks today:  
What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?  
They didn't know the answers to those questions.

But God listened.

I will provide food for you, God said to the Israelites,  
"so that then you will know that I am the LORD your God."  
And bread covered the surface of the wilderness,  
a fine, flaky substance, like frost on the ground. (Exodus 16:11-15)

This bread, manna, was a bread of which they had never eaten.

It was wonder bread.

It was not given in exchange for their labor.

It was not controlled by the powerful for leverage.

It could not be owned or hoarded.

This bread was given simply because they were hungry,  
not because they were productive.

It was given generously as a free gift, not in exchange for power.

And it was meant to be shared so that those who had much  
did not have too much  
and those who had little did not have too little.

God's economics are the economics of a new kingdom.

In John, chapter 6,

Jesus feeds the multitudes with five barley loaves and two fish.

And just in case we weren't impressed by that,

John tells us that they were small loaves and dinky fish.

From five loaves and two fish, the people ate as much as they wanted.

When they all had enough, Jesus told his disciples,

"Gather the pieces that are left over.

Let nothing be wasted."

Let nothing be wasted.

The disciples filled twelve baskets with the bread that was left over.

Twelve baskets of wonder bread.

Don't miss what's happening here.

Jesus is not only reenacting the story of Israel, he's renewing it.

"So that then you will know that I am the LORD your God."

Here's the thing. God gives bread and wants our worship.

But, too often, God's people eat the bread and want . . . more bread.

In God we trust, we say, even as we go about hoping

and searching and working for our own Wonder Bread.

And where will this bread come from?

Well, you go to those who have it.

You'll either have to get it through an exchange of money

or you'll have to use your power

to simply take it from one with less power.

And all of a sudden, an anxiety creeps in for everyone,  
"Where will I get tomorrow's bread?"

So we work and we work and we work and can never rest.  
We eat and we eat and we eat and are never fed.  
Because never-ending hunger must be met with never-ending consumption,  
the ones with too much eat at the expense of the ones with too little.  
In an economy based on scarcity, there is never be enough bread.  
It's the same flawed system founded on the same evil myths  
bowing to the same false gods  
that take the same perilous tolls on our bodies and our souls.

*We forget that it's not the gift that nourishes us,  
it's the giver.  
It's not the bread we need,  
it's the baker.*

After Jesus fed the thousands,  
the crowds wanted to take him and make him king by force.  
Of course they did.  
They wanted a political means to advance  
what they perceived to be God's cause in the world.  
Every election season, modern-day disciples are confronted with the same temptation.  
We want our candidate to control the Wonder Bread.

But Jesus, he would have nothing to do with that.  
He withdrew to a mountain to be by himself and then took a walk across the lake.  
The next day, when the crowds found him on the other side of the lake,  
they said to him, "Rabbi, *when* did you get here?"

But Jesus knew the reason for their search.  
Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you're looking for me  
not because you saw miraculous signs,  
but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."

But the people, like us, were so use to trading in the economics of scarcity.  
They asked him, "What must we do to do the works that God requires?"  
In other words, what do we have to do for God in order to get this Wonder Bread?

But Jesus edits their question.  
Jesus uses the great red pen and corrects their subject.  
What should we do so that we can do the works of God?"  
Jesus responds, "The Work of God is this: believe the one God has sent."  
Anything – anything -- that takes God's place  
as both the subject and object of our worship is idolatry.

Then, Jesus corrects the direct object of their question.  
What should we do so that we are doing the works of God?  
But Jesus replies in the singular. Works?  
This is the work of God: believe the one God sent.  
We do not have to do several things to have a right relationship with God.  
No, the right relationship we seek comes by gift, not by what we do.

Finally, Jesus corrects the verb in their question.  
What should we be doing?, the people asked.  
Doing? Doing? Believe.  
Belief is not simply an assent to a set of doctrine.  
It's more than our thoughts, and it's more than our works.  
Belief is whole-body trust, thoughts, works, hearts, minds.

But the crowds still want the sign.  
Earn our trust, they say, give us more bread.  
Sure, you provided barley bread for thousands on one afternoon,  
but Moses gave manna in the desert for forty years.  
Supersize it, and we'll believe.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth,  
it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven,  
but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For  
the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life.  
He who comes to me will never go hungry,  
and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:25-35)

This is where we come in, again.  
It is the work of the church to practice the politics of Jesus  
and to participate in the kingdom economics.

One in ten people in the world are hungry, right now.  
One in six children living in the United States in food-insecure households.  
Meanwhile, many, many people, including us,  
sometimes struggle to know the difference between enough and too much.  
When we think of the enormity of this problem,  
we tend to react with pity, hopelessness, or apathy.  
But Jesus calls us back to himself with trust,  
so that we can live in simplicity, hope, and a commitment to community.

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread",  
let us remember that "us" and "our"  
puts us in solidarity with the one-in-ten, the one-in-six,  
but also with those who need God to teach them what it means to have enough.

You see, "Give us this day our daily bread"  
is a petition that provides justice and hope when it is prayed by people who mean it.

Wonder bread.  
Did you know Wonder Bread originated in Indianapolis?  
It debuted on May 21, 1921, after a blind promotion with ads  
that only stated a "Wonder" was coming.

"I am the bread of life, Jesus said.  
Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

God's gift is not given in exchange for our labor,  
it cannot be controlled by the powerful,  
and it will not be owned and hoarded.

God's bread is given because people are hungry,  
not because we are productive.

God's bread is given generously as a free gift, not as leverage.

God's bread is meant to be shared  
so that those who have much do not have too much a  
and those who have little do not have too little.

God's economics are the economics of a new kingdom,  
a kingdom of abundance, centered in Christ.

Together, may we live the truth of that well-known Latin American prayer:

Oh God, to those who hunger, give bread,  
and to those who have bread,  
give the hunger for justice.

Amen. So be it.