

Food That Endures

John 6:24-35

August 1, 2021

First Presbyterian, Luling

The crowd is still thinking about the miracle of the bread. Having their tummies miraculously filled was a good feeling, and they want to hang out with the man who made it happen. If he can fill their tummies again, that would be wonderful; and if he can do something even more amazing, then they want to be present when it happens. They chase him across the Sea of Galilee to see what sign he will perform next.

Jesus is on to them. He says, essentially—you aren't following me because you care about the signs I do; you followed me because I fed you bread and fish. Then he makes the contrast that I want us to think about today. He says, "Don't work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life." You don't want the food that perishes, but you want the food that endures.

It turns out, by the end of the passage, that Jesus isn't talking about actual physical food that goes in tummies. But the crowd thinks he is. The crowd thinks they know what he means about the food that perishes. They had, of course, in their tradition and memory and celebrations, remembered the gift of the manna, which Beth read about from Exodus. They were in the wilderness, hungry, bemoaning the loss of the good food they had enjoyed in Egypt when they were enslaved. God provides them quail and manna from heaven. The manna came every morning, and they were to gather only enough for that day. If they gathered too much, it would be ruined by the next morning. Food that perishes. But that food was a gift from God, a reminder that God had not forgotten them, a reminder that God was present with them, even in their bewildered wilderness wanderings. They thought that Jesus's feeding the 5000 was a modern-day updating of the manna—bread that God provided for them, but food that would still perish, not endure.

The food that endures is a little trickier to track down. I did a little internet searching—so take that for what it's worth--to find what foods last longest. I found a list of ten. Some of them surprised me. Twinkies aren't on the list, despite their reputation. Ten foods that last the longest: white rice, honey, salt, soy sauce, sugar, dried beans, pure maple syrup, powdered milk, hard liquor, and pemmican—a food of Native Americans which is a mixture ground up dried meat, mixed with berries and rendered fat. Interesting list, huh?

Or take this loaf of communion bread. My mom baked it last Tuesday. I had to keep it in the freezer so it wouldn't get moldy and spoil before this morning. But this loaf of sandwich bread that I got from HEB can stay on the counter for weeks without getting moldy and spoiling. Is that the food that endures? Food that has ingredients I can't pronounce and preservatives?

None of this food that we can see and touch and taste is really what Jesus was talking about. The crowd isn't too far off when they make the connection with manna, but that isn't exactly it either. The manna did perish and though it was a reminder of God's presence, it wasn't God present in the manna itself.

Jesus makes the unprecedented claim that he is the food that endures. He is the bread of life. The gift of his life is the food that endures to eternal life. The manna in the wilderness reminded them of God's presence, and was a gift from God. The bread and fish at the 5000 were evidence of a miracle and thus God's activity. But Jesus is saying the bread of life, the bread of heaven, the food that endures is not just a reminder or a sign, but God's actual presence in him, the person of Jesus.

The food that endures to eternal life sustains us, body and soul. It's the gift of Jesus himself, the presence of God in our midst, the relationship with God that Jesus gives to us. It is food that feeds us now and feeds us into eternity.

The word that is translated "endures" here—the food that endures to eternal life—is the same word that is used multiple times later in John, to describe "abiding." Remember the vine and branches "⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... ⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." And later on, in Jesus's promise that he will send the Holy Spirit, he promises that he and the Father will come and "make our home" with those who love them. Enduring and abiding and making a home are all the same verb. The food that endures, abides, and makes a home with us is Jesus himself, the very presence of God with us.

In a few minutes, we will gather around our tables and eat food that will indeed perish, in the form that we can see and smell and touch and taste. But we know that it's more than that. We've experienced it. We will receive the gift of the food that endures to eternal life. The bread of life is both the meal and the host of the meal, because Jesus gives us himself in the sacrament.

35 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.