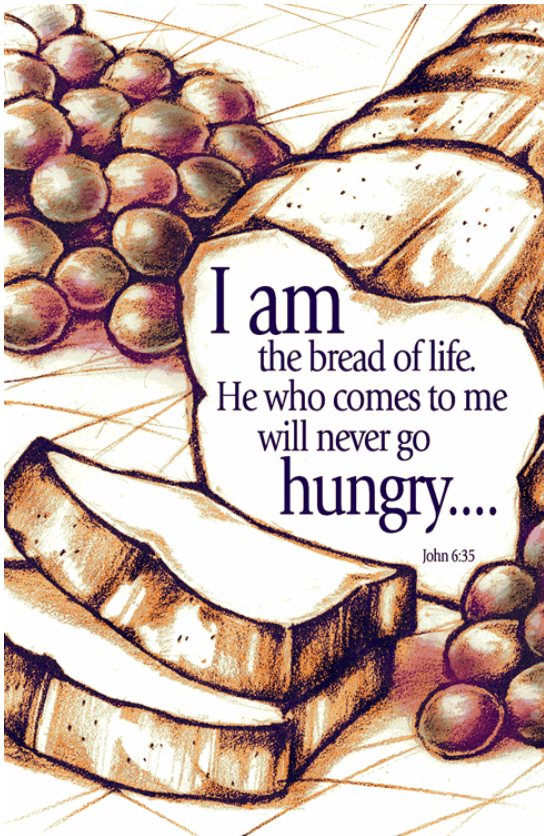


THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, March 5, 2006

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?" 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. 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." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 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? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 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. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 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."

Little Johnnie went to an Ash Wednesday service and listened very attentively to the sermon talking about self-denial and the carrying of the cross. When the family returned home, he ran over to show a little neighbor that he also got a smudge on the forehead. Naturally, she wanted to know what Ash Wednesday meant. Oh, he replied that is when Christians begin their diet.

Well, on Wednesday evening, many of our people did not so much go on a diet, but they did gather, expressing their deep desire to sense God's presence anew and live in harmony with God. How moving and touching when many were able to sing from deep inside, "It was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed! Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

It does make sense to talk of a Christian diet after all! No matter how smoothly sophisticated, technologically advanced, intellectually gifted or artistically inclined we may or may not be, all human beings -- all living creatures -- must eat to survive. We must take in nourishment of the right kind in order to keep our bodies healthy, functioning and able to maintain life. It is the same for our souls. Perhaps that is why; of all the images Jesus uses to speak of himself, his mission and his sacrifice, the two most universally accessible and meaningful still remain Bread and Water. Today, just as they did 2,000 years ago, Jesus as the Bread of Life and as

Living Water suggests to our hungry, thirsty bodies and souls that in the **bread and water** he provides is the basic sustenance necessary for life.

On this first Sunday of Lent and every time that we gather around the Table of the Lord we symbolically eat and drink to celebrate God's **presence** in a visible way. **The awareness of God's presence is at the heart of the spiritual life.** Bread and Water. Far from being **prison fare** this is the universal "soul food" of the Christian. What many wandering Americans are looking for in their Big Mac burgers, Haagen-Dazs sundaes and Pizza Hut stuffed-crusts **is simply found and easily digested** in the Bread of Life and Living Water of Jesus Christ!

In our Scripture reading Jesus said that the only diet that can feed our starving spirits and fill our empty insides is "the food that endures for eternal life" **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."** Jesus promised to be a **daily-bread presence** for all who believe in him. **Jesus' holy presence is to sustain us and nourish us each day -- providing a sense of wholeness, of fullness, of entire satisfaction.** Jesus **promised** to be a daily-bread presence for all who believe in him. Jesus' holy presence is to sustain us and nourish us each day -- providing a sense of wholeness, of fullness, of entire satisfaction.

One thing that makes bread such a good medium to convey the image of soul-sustaining nourishment is the life giving process it goes through to become a fragrant loaf. What really makes bread is **yeast**. A tiny one-celled organism that grows and metabolizes its own food with great speed, yeast organisms "work" in the dough, slightly fermenting and releasing gasses so that the bread begins to rise.

Jesus, the Bread of Life, is energized in each one of us **by divine yeast -- by the Spirit of the living God**, who sent Christ to be among us, **to be for us, to be in us.** To benefit fully from this Bread of Life, we must keep our lives, our spirits, **"yeasty" -- vital and ever growing.**

Are you saying "yes" to the nourishing possibilities the Bread of Life is offering you? If we are filling up on the Bread of Life, we can trust in the Spirit's presence and power in our lives. It is that **trust that allows us to take on what appears to others as "risks."** **Trusting in the Spirit** lets us "go for it" ~ even when conventional wisdom would advise us to sit on the sidelines. When our spirits are resting in trust, **they can do anything.** No matter where we go, no matter what difficulties we may encounter, a constant food supply is always at hand, always guaranteed. Our bodies **must be fed** every day to keep them physically able. Our spiritual body **must also be nurtured** and renewed every day to keep us sustained spiritually.

The life that Jesus' daily-bread presence promises **is much more than mere ongoing existence.** It is the gift of eternal life, which we receive from Christ, the promise of full participation in the presence of God. Only Jesus can satisfy the hungry heart. Only Jesus has the Words of Eternal Life.

AMEN.

