

If You Feed Them...

August 12, 2012

John 6: 35, 41-51

35 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.

41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" 43 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

In 1989 a movie came out starring Kevin Costner. In the movie Costner plows up part of his corn field and builds a baseball field. The name of the movie was "Field of Dreams" and probably the most memorable line in the film is "If you build it, they will come." You have heard me mention our low attendance from the pulpit several times recently. This isn't just a concern I have had recently, it's a concern that we have been talking about for several years here at Hooker Memorial. I stopped by some friends house last Sunday afternoon for a few minutes, and they asked me, "What can we do to get more people to come to church?" I wish I had the answer. If I did our sanctuary would be overflowing every Sunday. The one thing I have noticed however is that when we have a covered dish luncheon immediately following the service, our attendance is up 15 to 20% for that particular day. I'm not the only one who has picked up on this. And I'm fairly sure that we're not the only church to have the same marked increase in attendance when a meal is served.

The story goes that the second grade teacher was introducing her class to the various religions of the students in her class. She thought that by having a show and tell it may mean more to the other students. She told each student to bring in an object that helped describe their religion. The next day she began to call on the students. The first little boy came to the front of the class: my name is Isaac and I'm Jewish. He held up his object and said, this is a menorah. The second little boy came up: my name is Peter and I'm catholic. These are rosary beads. The third little boy came to the front of the class: My name is Johnny, I'm a Methodist, and this is a casserole. In the movie Field of Dreams, the voice said to Costner, if you build it, they will come. I wonder...as Christians, have we picked up the mantra and changed it slightly to be, If you feed them, they will come.

Maybe that is what Jesus was trying in the sixth chapter of John when he took five loaves and two fish and fed 5,000. When he went across the lake, they followed him for more. If you feed them, they will come. But as we found out last week, bread, at least physical bread that would spoil was not what Jesus wanted to feed them. We picked up our scripture lesson this morning with the same verse we closed with last Sunday: John 6: 35, **Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."** Jesus is saying, I have a different kind of bread. I have the bread of eternity. If you believe in me, I can offer you eternity with God. That is why God sent me from heaven that through me you may have eternity. The people wanted no part of what Jesus was saying. Eat my flesh, drink my blood. I have been sent from heaven. The Jews were a very literal people, they were having trouble believing what Jesus was telling them. Listen to verses 41 and 42: **At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from**

heaven'?" We know this boy; he grew up down the street. We know his momma and daddy; we know his brothers and sisters. Heaven indeed, check that boy out; see if he bumped his head. As Christians today, we read how the Jews turned away from Jesus and wonder what was wrong with them. Why wouldn't they just believe in Jesus? We have a distinct advantage. I've said this before, we read the book, we know how the story ends. And yet, we ask the question how could the Jews not believe him? Let's see if I can put this in a context we can understand. You each came here this morning expecting to see me stand up here and deliver a sermon. So far that's what is happening, right? So far, I'm believable. How would you react if all of a sudden I began to try my best to convince you that I could flap my arms and fly? Look, I can't prove it to you right now, but I really can fly. You should see me when I get wound up. I can soar with the best of the birds. Man, all I have to do is catch a slight updraft, up I go and the view. You just wouldn't believe all I can see from up there. I think some of you would be reaching for your cell phones calling Maggie telling her to hurry home from Christmount. Guerry's gone off the deep end and needs a rubber room. Can you see how the locals back then would have trouble believing Jesus?

Jesus goes on in the next several verses explaining who he is and why he is here. In essence, what he is saying is that God wants a relationship with each of us. God sent his son to earth to pave the way for us to have that relationship. Jesus is the gateway to a relationship with God. God, beginning with Adam and moving through all our familiar Bible characters, Abraham, Moses, Noah, Job, Solomon, David, and all the prophets wants a relationship with man. What is the one thing we each know about relationships; they are hard. Even the best of relationships take an enormous amount of hard work. A marriage is a perfect example of a relationship. It can be good or bad. Let's dwell on the good ones. Even the best of marriages take a lot of work on both parts. In the beginning a couple really has to get to know each other. Oh sure, we think when we say I do that we know the other person. We have an idea, but it takes a lot of hard work, communication, and understanding for the marriage to last. In any marriage there will still be differences, however, most of the time they can be dealt with to come to some type of mutual agreement. The key all along for the successful marriage is the willingness for each person to work together for the common good of each other and the marriage. A marriage is just an example of a relationship. There are a multitude of other types; parents and children; siblings; friends; co-workers; church members; the list goes on and on. The one common thread in each successful relationship is the willingness of all parties to work together for the common good of all. Everyone here today has been in several different types of relationships. I'm almost positive that each one of us could tell of the struggle it took and/or still takes to maintain that relationship. All of our relationships are marked with joy and sadness. In each relationship, there is love and anger, pride and disappointment, pleasure and pain. We have all struggled with relationships; some have been successful while others have failed. And that is not to place blame; it is just a statement of fact. Relationships are built on love and mutual respect; and that is the relationship God wants to have with you. God sent his son Jesus to teach us how to love. In John 15:13 we read, **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.** Jesus loved us so much, he gave his own life for us. That is the relationship that Jesus modeled for us; love, understanding, forgiveness, more love. Love conquers all.

Several weeks ago I had the occasion to be speaking with the minister of a church in a different denomination. We were discussing our congregations, the similarities and the differences. There were a lot more similarities than differences. He had only been preaching at his church for three years. When he started preaching there, their average attendance was running 60 to 65 on any given Sunday. Now their attendance is averaging 90. I had to ask him what he was doing to cause such an increase in attendance in three years. He informed me that they were doing nothing special. They haven't changed the music, they haven't added any extra services early or late, and they are relatively traditional. He wasn't promising prosperity, fame, fortune, good health, more friends, or anything else. All he was doing was reading the scriptures and preaching the word of God. He did however let me know that on the days when they followed the service with a covered dish meal, attendance was up to around 110 to 120. Then he jokingly told me, If you feed them, they will come. I think there was more in what he was saying than he realized. What this minister told me was that he was feeding his congregation a steady diet of the word of God. And his congregation is growing. And it's not just growing in numbers. It is also growing in spirit. That church is filled with the Holy Spirit and when those people leave on Sunday, they

take the Holy Spirit with them. They don't leave it in the pew to pick it up again next Sunday. No, they carry it out to feed the rest of the world. **Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."**

As Christians, it is our obligation to take the word of God out to the people. We cannot leave it here in the sanctuary each Sunday, hoping it will be here for us when we return. God doesn't want us to leave it in this room, He wants us to take it out. God wants a relationship with each person on the earth. The only way for Him to have that relationship is to take the word out to the people. There are 21 chapters in the in the Gospel of John, and that chapter has 25 verses. In verse 15, Jesus is talking to Simon Peter and tells him **"Feed my Lambs."** Again, in verse 16 he tells him **"Take care of my sheep."** And once again, in verse 17 Jesus tells Peter, **"Feed my sheep."** Peter is not the only one being told. Each of us are being told to take the word of God out to the people. Feed my sheep; feed them a diet of the word of God; feed them a diet of the Holy Spirit.

At the beginning of my sermon this morning I related a question a couple asked me last Sunday afternoon; Guerry, how can we get more people to come to church? I told them I didn't know. I've changed my mind. I think I know now: If you feed them, they will come.