

John 6:35-50

## Alive and Whole

Late in July, I flew back to Alberta to not only attend the Celebration of Life for one of my uncles but to officiate at it. I was so honoured to have been asked to do so for I loved this uncle dearly. Some of my most distinct memories of joy as a child involved my Uncle Gerard. I also recognized that, save for my cousin and his wife, my dad, and my brother and sister-in-law, no one else in my family had ever heard me preach in person. I believe a few of them watch the worship videos, but to see what I am like or how I am as a preacher and minister in the flesh was something few had experienced. So, it was with hope and gratitude, along with a little trepidation, that I ventured off to be with my family in this time of remembering, honouring, and tears. Thankfully it seemed to go over well enough.

I also got to spend the whole day with extended family, some of whom I had not seen or really had opportunity to speak with in the nearly fourteen years that I have been away. There is a major age difference between myself and many of my cousins so when I left my hometown many of them were young and our lives were in very different places. Part of the joy of the day was connecting with them now. They have varied and interesting lived experiences. One of my favourite moments came when one cousin, who I think had some reservations about what I was like, and likely a few preconceived notions due to the fact that I am a minister said to me, "Oh, you are just you." Not sure what he was expecting, but I guess he was satisfied that I could be both a minister and be just who I am at the same time.

As I was preparing to go to Alberta it was a line from this very piece of scripture that was in my mind when, after Jesus says "I am the Bread of Life" and offers up a strong defense regarding that, the people say Hold on! We know you, we know your family, you parents, how can Jesus now say, 'I came down out of heaven' and expect anyone to believe him?

It is often the people who think they know us the best who have the hardest time believing certain things about us. But this piece about Jesus is much bigger than anything we may have experienced. We know we are mere mortals who struggle with sin. We often mess things up knowingly and unknowingly.

And when Jesus says to the people who have followed him across the lake "I am the bread of life" all they see is the carpenter son, the guy they grew up with, even though just the day before they witness him perform a miracle of providing enough food for everyone. Jesus to them is as ordinary as they come. Not only that, gods, well they are supposed to be powerful, not needing any mere human to achieve their ends. In fact,

often humans were thought to be pawns in the games of the gods. If their God who was known to them through the stories of the ages was powerful, God would not be working with this guy Jesus. And the audacity of Jesus to claim that he and God were in this together.

And Jesus is not helping the situation, the more they bicker, snicker, and argue about him, the more adamant he gets about his relationship with God and the work that God is doing through him. It could also be that the people could not get their minds wrapped around the fact the God was and is choosing to work through humankind. Yet if you recall, the Hebrew people were looking for Emmanuel, meaning God with us, God was truly with them, walking with them literally, figuratively, and spiritually, through this one named Jesus.

Unlike other gods, God of the Hebrew people, and the God to whom we as Christians look to for relationship with human beings, our God does not demand that we believe yet willingly leads us to believe that God is God and Jesus is the one sent to show us God in the flesh. It feels like such a conundrum to explain mostly because it is not explainable.

Just this past week, I was doing a service at a senior's residence. One person who had attended the service whispered to me, "When you are done visiting with everyone, I have a question for you." So, before I was set to leave, we sat and visited. Now she, a long time Christian, said to me, "I can get my mind wrapped around the thought of God. I understand my need for a saviour in Jesus Christ, but what is it with the Holy Spirit. I don't understand that."

I realized then, as I so often have and as I am attempting to unpack this scripture, that there is no really succinct language to use when talking about or trying to explain God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It is not that it is airy fairy stuff, it is that it is deeply personal yet fully lived in community...in relationship with one another, but first and foremost lived in relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It is earthy yet we are not able to pin point a spot or touch God. And how does one begin to describe God or our relationship to and with God. If we could describe God we would and should be at a loss.

So Jesus uses bread to describe the ordinary and the extraordinary. I appreciate the way Professor Matt Skinner talks about the progression of the story of Jesus supplying bread to people. So I am loosely using his explanation and sharing it with you. This story about bread actually begins earlier as Jesus provides food for a crowd of at least 5000 using five barley loaves and two fish and miraculously multiplying the provisions. It points to the fact that people need to be fed right now in their everyday lives. Food for their bodies. It is an immediate need.

The story continues with the crowd following Jesus the next day, because they want to be fed again. In other words, people want food on a regular basis. It is an ongoing need. Then the scripture from today points to the desire we have for even more food security.

This kind of security is for a lifetime and beyond. So Jesus begins to speak of eternal life.

People need bread for their bodies but also, whether or not they realize it, people crave the bread of heaven immediately, on an ongoing basis and the knowledge that it is ours eternally. There is security in that, and if nothing else God is safe in the sense that God is always present, is there when we need, but present to us always.

For the writer of the Gospel of John, eternal life in Christ speaks not only to an eternal life beyond this life, but immediately to the quality of our lives. Are we living in and with love? Love for those we love but also love for those who would do us harm or are difficult to love.

As usual, I am not advocating that you place yourself in harms way or think that you have to stay in an abusive relationship. This is about love that is broader and deeper than we can imagine in any human being. We human being are fragile and often broken, but the call on our lives through Jesus is the we can have eternal life in Christ. Eternal life is another way of saying we believe in Christ. We may question, but knowing that not everything can be answered we trust and believe, we abide in the love and knowledge of Christ. All of this to say that eternal life is about being in relationship with Jesus.

The question or questions become what does this kind of life mean? What kind of life is Jesus offering us? All of this is deeply connected to the resurrection and the ascension of Christ after the crucifixion.

It is again important to remember that all we know about Christ was written by those who lived and experienced Jesus in the flesh and were witnesses to the death, resurrection and ascension. These words were written...these stories shared after the fact. And those who wrote and spoke about Jesus continued to live as people who believed.

Christ died, but Christ, a fully human person who understands our challenges and what it means to be flesh and blood is also fully God. This is not something that is explained, but rather it is lived in the knowledge of that truth. Understanding Jesus as friend, brother, guide, God, and living in that knowledge changes everything. It changes us.

Jesus offers us a relationship where God abides with, through, and in us, and because of that we are changed. We live differently. Our circumstances may not change, through often they do, but somehow that relationship gives us a new lens from which to view and understand the world. The response to the relationship freely given, is to love, have compassion, seek justice, and to live humbly with God. No pretenses, only who we are offered to Christ as Christ offered himself to us.

Life, eternal life, becomes the knowledge of God with us lived out each day in our words, thoughts and actions. Life, eternal life, becomes the knowledge that God loves,

Jesus lives, and the Holy Spirit is moving in us and in the world. Though this work were  
are made fully alive and whole. Praise be to the God of love and life!