



**VILLAGE  
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

# I am the Bread of Life

SCRIPTURE:  
John 6:25-35

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January 8, 2023 – Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

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**L**ittle Five Points is this cool, hip, neighborhood between downtown Atlanta and Decatur where I lived when I taught at Columbia Seminary. I was set to meet some friends for dinner there. I arrived early so I thought I would just walk around. There are lots of trendy eateries. The first public school that was converted into lofts is there. Art galleries. Organic grocery stores. Tattoo parlor. I walked into a shop that sold clothing and jewelry. I was just looking around but my attention was piqued when I overheard a young woman who was looking at the jewelry cases ask about a cross. The equally young clerk with all kinds of piercings and tattoos standing behind the counter asked her, “Do you want a plain one or one with a little man on it?” I was startled by her question and because I am sinful man in need of God’s grace, I was going to blurt out, “That’s our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!”

But because God is gracious and just, the Holy Spirit took hold of me and so, I gently moved over and said, “I’m sorry but I could not help but overhear. Um. That little man? That’s Jesus Christ.” And the clerk looked at me blankly, shrugged her shoulders, and said, “Okay.”

That evening at dinner I was incensed and relayed this conversation to my friends. They were nonplussed. One of them said to me, “You know, Rodger, you live and teach in a Christian seminary. All you people do every day is think about Jesus and sing about Jesus and read about Jesus and write about Jesus. You know, the rest of the world is not that way.”

Friends, we make the claim that we are the Church of the Jesus Christ. A few weeks ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus and now he is loose in the world. We make the bold claim that Christ is our cornerstone—that our lives are built on Jesus Christ as the foundation. So it seems to me that we should know

more about who Jesus Christ is and how we are to share him with the world.

We start today a six-week sermon series on the seven “I am” statements of Jesus. Only in the gospel of John does Jesus say directly who he is. In the other gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—Jesus most often asks, “Who do you say that I am?” or “Who do others say that I am?” But John’s gospel is different. In John’s gospel, he says seven times, “I am...” and then fills in a statement. Today we explore the first “I am” statement.

Our passage follows the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000—the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four gospels. In that miracle story, 5,000 people are following Jesus and they become hungry and in John’s gospel, a boy is found who has five loaves and two fish and Jesus takes the loaves and fish and blesses, breaks, and shares them and everyone is fed. Then his disciples leave on a boat to go across the Sea of Galilee and apparently, they were impatient to leave (perhaps Jesus was doing more healing?) so they leave him behind but he catches up to them walking on the water. Then, the next day, the crowds have followed Jesus—probably in their own boats. That’s where we start the Bible passage.

John 6:25 says, “When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said, to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’” This is legitimate question because remember the crowds did not see Jesus get in the boat so they are simply asking, “How did you get here?”

Jesus answers 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.” Jesus is saying: You’re only here because you want another free meal. Then he tells them, “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

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on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

Now Jesus begins to talk about a different kind of bread. The people are asking for more bread just like yesterday. Jesus is saying there is a different bread that they need. The phrase “Son of Man” is John’s favorite way to describe Jesus. In the other gospels, Jesus is referred to as the “Son of God.” The “Son of Man” is the most humble of all the titles for Jesus. He was born of humankind and is here to serve all of humankind.

Then the crowd said to Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” They are still stuck on the actual bread from yesterday. They want to Jesus to show them how to make many loaves out of a few loaves. It could be my imagination, but I think Jesus gets a little annoyed here. He tells them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” Okay, so here is where it gets really real. I think the crowd starts to get impatient.

“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.’” That quote? “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” That’s from Exodus 16 and Psalm 78. The people are quoting scripture to Jesus—further evidence that they do not know who he is. You can do many things with Jesus Christ but one thing I would NOT do is to quote scripture to him. It is not going to go well. Remember the Gospel of John starts with, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

And Jesus says back, “Very truly,” which is actually Bible code language for “you are not the brightest of God’s children.” “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.”

Now Jesus tells them: We are not just talking about bread. Yesterday, when I fed you, you had bread. It was good bread. But now I’m not talking about bread from heaven. Bread from God. We’re talking about bread that gives life. Then the people rightly ask, “Sir, give us this bread always.” I love that question.

And here it comes... the first of the seven “I am” statements. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes

to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

I am the bread of life. Not just bread. Bread of heaven. Bread that makes us whole. That completely satisfies. That gives us life.

In 1994, I made my first trip to Kansas. It was to Wichita, host city of the General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Nearly 5,000 Presbyterians from all over the U.S. came to Wichita for the 10-day meeting. We were used to gathering in cities like Philadelphia and Atlanta and Orlando and Dallas so Wichita was a logistical challenge.

We were spread out in 14 hotels in the city so everyone had to ride shuttles everywhere. The convention center downtown was too small to host all of the Assembly so we met there and at Wichita State University and Friends University. Early on, there were lots of people whining, “Why are we going to Kansas? Whose brilliant idea was it to meet in Wichita? Was Peoria booked up?”

At the opening worship service, I was seated next to a friend from New York City and he was not happy. In my first moments talking with him, he complained about his hassles in getting to Wichita, having to change plans twice. He complained about his hotel and how far away it was. He said he had meetings at Friends University and Wichita State and did not know how he was supposed to get from one to the other. He said he looked and couldn’t find a single Korean restaurant in the whole city.

Then it came time for the Lord’s Supper and a family walked up the long, center aisle—a mom and dad and their four adolescent children—all carrying baskets of bread. They were fourth-generation Presbyterians and the bread they were carrying all came from wheat they had grown on their farm. Last year, they had prayed over the seeds as they planted them. Then when they harvested the wheat, they had blessed the wheat. When the grain was milled, they prayed over the flour that was produced. Then the bags of flour went out to 63 churches across southern Kansas where children, young people, women and men baked more than 4,000 loaves of bread all from the wheat from this family’s farm. When we shared the body of Christ, I turned to my friend and passed it to him and said, “Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven, the bread of life.” And he was teary and smiled

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and said, “Yes. And the bread of Kansas.” As we were leaving, each of us was given a small loaf made from the same flour and a cloth towel that had the Presbyterian seal in needlepoint, a sunflower and the words, “Bless you”—all handmade. Later, he turned to me and said, “I’m so glad we’re here in Kansas.”

Jesus said to them: God, our Father and Mother, is the one 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. The people asked him, “Give us that bread.” Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry. Those who believe in me will never be thirsty.” Trust this. Whatever you are hungering for. Whatever you are thirsting for. Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven, the bread of life, will satisfy!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.