

“I AM...the Bread of Life”

Exodus 16:9-27 • John 6:25-35

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I'm sure you have heard the saying, “seeing is believing?” One of the most powerful things is an eyewitness testimony. Even more powerful is seeing something for yourself. But is seeing really believing? It's very difficult to convince you that something you've seen with your own eyes is not true, which is why optical illusions work. Today I want to suggest that seeing does not always lead to believing.

In 1859 Charles Blondin, the world's most famous funambulist (which is a fancy word for a tightrope walker) stretched a two inch rope across Niagara Falls, planning to walk across. When the day came there were huge crowds on both the American and Canadian sides of the falls. Most of the people there didn't believe he could make it across. They were certain that he would end up falling to his death. Not only did he make it, he did it over and over again, adding to the risk each time. Once he crossed blindfolded, another time on a bicycle, and once he even did it carrying a stove on his back. Halfway across he lit a fire in the stove and cooked an omelet while suspended 160 feet above the thundering falls.

On July 15, 1859 Blondin crossed the tightrope pushing a wheelbarrow while blindfolded. When he reached the other side he asked the audience if they thought he could do it again carrying a person in the wheelbarrow. They had seen him cross several times and so they all said they believed that he could. So then he asked them, “Which one of you will get into the wheelbarrow?” No one did. There's a big difference between believing something intellectually and actually having faith.

This morning we are continuing our study during Lent of the “I Am” statements of Jesus in the gospel of John. In each of these statements Jesus shares a little more of who he is and what it means for us, but in each case the big claim is that he is God and each time he points us to a

passage in the Old Testament that he fulfills. In John 6 Jesus says twice, “I am the bread of life.”

This chapter begins with the familiar story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. This is one of the most important miracles that Jesus performed during his life. Why do I say that? Because it's the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four of the gospels. Jesus certainly did a lot of miraculous things. In fact John ends his gospel saying that Jesus did a lot more than is written down. We know that he healed people of incurable diseases like leprosy and blindness. He even raised several people who had died. He walked on water and calmed storms. So why would feeding a huge crowd be so important that it's in all the gospels? Because it shows us who Jesus is.

Jesus and his disciples cross the Sea of Galilee in a boat and they are followed by a huge crowd. Jesus asks the disciples where they will get enough bread to feed all these people. Of course he already knew but he wanted them to think about it. Philip answered that it would cost a year's wages to buy enough bread for each person to have a little bite. Then Andrew, Peter's brother, brings a young boy who has brought a lunch with five little rolls and two sardines. As soon as he says it out loud he must have realized how ridiculous it sounded because he then says, “but what are they for so many?”

Jesus tells the disciples to have all the people sit down and he proceeds to start handing bread and fish to his disciples for them to pass out. When everyone had eaten all they wanted Jesus tells his disciples to pick up all the leftovers and they end up with twelve baskets full. The people seem to realize that they have experienced a miracle. They say, “This indeed is the prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus retreats to the hills to pray while his disciples get in the boat to go back across the lake. This is when Jesus comes to the disciples walking on the water.

Have you ever had the experience of going to a restaurant for the first time and the food is so good you go back again the next day? And maybe the day after that as well? Well the next day all the people go looking for Jesus. When they can't find him they cross the lake and discover that he's already there. They ask him, "when did you come here?" Jesus knows their hearts. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." They wanted more.

Each of us has a hunger for God. It's the way he made us. But we don't naturally recognize that it's God that we desire. And so we try to satisfy our appetite with all kinds of other things, things that are not God, things like food or money. We think that what will make us happy are more possessions or a better job. We seek excitement through adventure or sex or revenge. Sometimes we just try to numb our desire for God with alcohol or drugs or scrolling through our social media on our phone. The truth is that earthly things will never satisfy our spiritual hunger. Let me say that again. Earthly things will never satisfy your spiritual hunger.

Jesus said, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." Many of those things we pursue thinking they will satisfy us are good things. Money and food are not bad. But they are not eternal. They won't last. Jesus says, "Don't waste your life running after things that are temporary. Spend your life focused on the thing that will last forever."

The people then ask Jesus a great question, the question that all of us ask at some point: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus has just said, "work for the food that endures," and they ask, "how do we do that?" They weren't prepared for the answer. Jesus basically said, "get in the wheelbarrow and let me push you across the tightrope." And he says the same thing to you. "This is the work of

God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

It was one thing for the people to see Blondin cross the tightrope pushing the wheelbarrow. But it seems so different when he asks us to get in. Before you're willing to get in the wheelbarrow you want some more assurances. Really you want some excuses. The people respond to Jesus by asking, "what sign will you do? You're claiming to be the Messiah. We want you to prove it, like Moses proved that God was leading him by sending the manna. Seeing is believing!"

I love this. They want a sign. They want Jesus to produce bread. Isn't that why they tracked him down? He just performed this sign. There was a Jewish belief at the time, taught by the rabbis, that when the Messiah came he would once again send manna. Jesus performed the sign, they all saw it, and yet they still don't believe.

Once again Jesus shows us that the Old Testament sign gets its true fulfillment in him. He says, "it was not Moses who have you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said, "yes, give us some of that bread and don't stop." Jesus says, "I am that bread because I am that God. If you believe in me, if you trust me, your soul will always be satisfied."

So what about you? Have you experienced God working in your life? Look around. He is working all around you. He gives you all the signs you could ever need if you are willing to see them. But it's also a little scary. All he asks is for us to believe. But believing is like getting in the wheel barrow. It means getting out of our comfort zone and trusting Jesus. But the truth is that it's not seeing that leads to believing but believing that leads to seeing. Trust Jesus today. Experience the bread of life that satisfies your deepest hunger. Come to the table. The feast is prepared for you.

Amen.