

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC  
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett  
8-9-09  
Drawn by God  
John 6:35-51, Ephesians 4:25-5:22

Please pray with me.

Our scripture from the Gospel according to John this week continues exactly where we left off last week. In 6:35, 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.” But Jesus is in the midst of unbelievers and detractors today. We hear a phrase that is familiar from the Gospel of Mark in verse 42, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” Just who does he think he is?! Where does Jesus get off making all these claims about himself? He is can’t be anybody special. He is just one of us! But I think that is the point Jesus is making.

But before we go there, let us look again at what is happening here. The author of the Gospel seems to repeat what we read last week. He again echoes what happened in the story of Moses and the people who were starving in the wilderness. Like those people, Jesus says in verse 43 that the people are complaining among themselves. But again, God is providing. This time instead of manna it is the bread of heaven, the bread of life, the living bread. Jesus reminds them again in that their ancestors ate manna in the wilderness.

But there is new material here: first, in verses 49 and 50, Jesus tells them explicitly how this bread is different. Their ancestors ate the manna from heaven but they still died. But the bread Jesus is talking about is the true bread that comes down from heaven, so that anyone who eats it will not die. Perhaps this is magic bread, or perhaps it is not literal “bread” at all.

Then Jesus says something astonishing: “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” He is not speaking literally. However, one way this might be interpreted is a foreshadowing of communion. But in the Gospel of John, at his last meal with the disciples

before his arrest, Jesus does not give the disciples the ritual of sharing the bread and the cup! Instead, he washes their feet. There is no bread and cup communion ritual in this Gospel.

Another possible interpretation is that this is one of those special Gnostic type messages, one that those who are “in the know” would understand. Remember that last week I told you that this Gospel is more mystical than the other Gospels. Those who have the gnosis or knowledge about how salvation or enlightenment is attained would understand that a messenger from God would bring knowledge of how to attain eternal life. Perhaps then, this “bread” is knowledge!

They would also know that that when an individual moves to a higher level of spirituality, they separate from or transcend the flesh. If Jesus is truly a messenger from God, if Jesus is truly of God or even God, he would come down from heaven and would give up his fleshly body to return to heaven. This would show his identity to be true. Those who imbibed of this knowledge, who believed what Jesus had taught, would have the knowledge of eternal life. Think about the saying we have: When someone is teaching you something compelling and wonderful, don't you want to “eat it all up?”

A second piece of new material here is that Jesus tells the crowd that “no one can come to him unless drawn by the father who sent him.” Jesus also says that “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. One way this teaching of Jesus has been used is to justify the doctrine of predestination. A simple explanation of predestination is that God has selected certain individuals to be saved even before they are born. If God intended you to be saved, God would teach you to seek Jesus before you were born. During your life you would then be drawn to

Jesus to receive your salvation. But right after he says this Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.” It just doesn’t seem to flow together.

We have been zooming in to specific verses in this scripture. If we zoom back out a little, we see that all of this conversation is Jesus’ answer to the Jews who are challenging him, his identity, and what he is teaching. Jesus is saying to them, there is a reason that you do not understand what I am teaching. There is a reason that you reject me, and all that I represent. You do not see the knowledge that I am sharing with you, because you have closed your minds. Only those who are seeking, only those who are open to God, will be open to the message of eternal life. Only those who have heard and learned from the Father, only those who are drawn by the father, will come to be fed the bread of eternity.

So the question Jesus might ask us is, are we drawn by the father? Are we open, seeking, listening, and learning from God? Are we believers in the power of eternal life? Do we understand the power of God to raise us to a new level? I ask you, are you ready to be transformed from those who are grateful to God for the gift of manna: all the physical blessings we need and yet still die, to those who eat the true bread of heaven, and experience eternal life right here and now? Do I hear a yes?

Then let us do it together! And how do we experience eternal life? Jesus said whoever believes has eternal life. Not will have, but has! It is now! So we just need to start living it. And just how do we do that?! Paul calls on us in Ephesians 5:2, to be imitators of God. Imitate God? How can we do that? Just who do we think we are? Remember that the people asked that about Jesus. Just who does he think he is?! Where does Jesus get off making all these claims about himself? They thought, he can’t be anybody special. He is just one of us! That is the point Jesus is making. Jesus called us brothers and sisters. Jesus was and is the son of God, and

we are the sons and daughters of God. Jesus was telling us we are all as special to God as he is. We need to claim and live into this identity. We have been and are drawn by God because we are the beloved children of God. And as beloved children of God, Paul tells us to live in love.

Living in love, is eternal life. Paul tells us how to do this. He spoke to the church in Ephesus because they had been through difficult times. They had experienced problems in their church that caused splits between the members. They had mis-communicated and been angry. They had lost relationships and experienced great pain. The things that had happened were keeping them from growing as individuals and threatening the life of their church family.

These things have happened in our lives. These things have happened in this church. These things happen in all lives, in all churches. It is part of being human. But there is another part of being human we can turn to- Love! The advice that Paul gave to the Ephesians is good advice for us. He tells us what we must do to heal. We must put away past hurts and misunderstandings, and speak the truth to each other. Although we have been hurt and angry, we must begin to reconcile and let go of bitterness.

We must confess our wrongs, say we are sorry with contrite hearts, and ask to begin in relationship again. We must remind ourselves how to work together for the benefit of each other, this church, the community and our ministry. We must practice ways to build each other up, and encourage each other to grow. We must be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgive one another.

As beloved children of God, we have been marked by the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. We must look carefully at our hearts, our minds, and our actions, and let go of the bad things of the past, in order to make room for the good things of the present to grow. We have each been given gifts, passions, love, a flame within that the Spirit of God will fan if we

allow it, if we invite it to happen. This is how we become imitators of God, This is how we live out our legacy as children of God. This is how our church will grow. This is the moment, this is the time, this is eternal life.

So I ask you are you drawn by the father? Are you open, seeking, listening, and learning from God? Are you believers in the power of eternal life? Do you understand the power of God to raise you and us together to a new level? I ask you, are you ready to be transformed to begin to experience eternal life right here and now? Do I hear a yes?!

If you are, then close your eyes and bow your heads, or lift up your faces to God. Let us pray. God we confess to you that there is brokenness in our lives, in our relationships and our church. God we ask for strength to apologize, to seek and to give forgiveness. God, give us the strength to let go of the past and open ourselves to you for the present and the future. Fan the flames of the love and passions you have given us so that we may use our gifts to lift up one another, to reach out to our community and to build your church. We ask all of these things in the name of your beloved son and our beloved Brother. Amen.

I declare to each and every one of you, you are forgiven and anointed by God. Let us go and begin living in eternity, eternal life, now.