

Sermon for Sunday, June 25, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"GOD'S BREAD LINE"

St. John 6:47-71

Text: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" St. Matthew 6:25

Back during the depression a discussion about bread would have been a vital subject. In those days when people prayed for their daily bread they really meant it and some even had to stand in line to get bread. In the days of Jesus the average man of the street knew what it was to miss a meal. His supply of daily bread was always short and many of them knew what it was like to hear their children crying for hunger and a piece of bread.

So, one Sabbath morning as Jesus stood in the synagogue at Capernaum teaching, the people who gathered to hear him asked him for a sign. They said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Then, as they stood there, they felt the hunger pangs gnawing at their stomachs; they remembered the cries of their children weeping for enough food and they decided what miracle they wanted him to do. They said, "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" In other words, they were saying that if Jesus was who he said he was--the Son of God--then he ought to meet their needs as God had done in the past. He ought to form a line and start passing out bread.

Now, let me point out to you that Jesus was always concerned about man's physical needs. As a matter of fact, the incident recorded in our scripture this morning occurs immediately after Jesus had fed the five thousand out there in the hill country on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. If you have pressing physical or material needs this morning you can be assured that Jesus is concerned about those needs. But please notice this! Jesus' concern for you goes far deeper than that. Jesus is not only concerned that you stay alive, but that you have life.

Isn't there a real difference between being alive and having life? In our text which is from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew we read, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" And in the scripture we read this morning Jesus says, "I am the bread of life."

In the years of my ministry I have had occasion to officiate at the funerals of persons who have committed suicide. In every case the person involved had the means of staying alive physically and materially. But they did not have life--life was simply not worth being alive. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Now, that is the sort of bread line that most of us need. Staying alive is not our deepest problem--having life is our most profound need.

Unfortunately, not everyone realizes this. There are still many who think that if they have more and more bread--more and more of the material things of life--that is all they need for happiness. It was just as true in Jesus' day. Do you remember the passage we read this morning that said, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."? There are many today who don't want to walk with Jesus. They think real living lies somewhere or somehow in the bread line of the world. They think that the sort of life Jesus offers them will be drab by comparison. They think the life Jesus offers them will not be thrilling and exciting, or that they will have to surrender some of the ways they are living

now. And you would be surprised how many people don't want to change their lives.

But people who don't want to walk with Jesus any more are walking off into disaster. I am deeply distressed at what I see happening in the lives of people today. Just for illustration, at the moment I am working with seven different marriages that are coming apart. And that is just the tip of the iceberg! Besides the ones I am working with directly, I know of twice that many more where the pressures are building up. And there must be many, many more than that right in our own congregation that I don't know about.

What's wrong with us? Why are there so many people going off in so many different tangents. Well, at least a large part of the problem is that we don't want to walk with Jesus. We are standing in the world's bread line.

Now, if I am nothing more than a part of the animal world; if I am nothing more than a higher form of creation--an evolved monkey with a college degree--then the world's bread line will meet all of my creaturely and emotional needs. But it is precisely here that the Bible tells me something about myself. It tells me that I am made in the image of God. It tells me that I am an off-spring of the divine and that my heart will be restless until it rests in him.

No, I am not an orphan of the apes, content to spend my life just monkeying around. I am not a mass of dancing dirt come from nowhere and going nowhere. No, I am not a forked radish, but a child of the Eternal. I am not a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on this gigantic flywheel, but I am the tadpole of an archangel. The fact is, the world's bread line will never manage to meet my deepest needs. Only when I walk with Jesus--only when I have him who is the real bread of life--only when I stand in God's bread line--will I find my deepest and most profound needs being met.

But let me make this observation: you can't stand in two lines at the same time. You can't even stand with one foot in one line and the other foot in the other line because they don't go in the same direction. That's why Jesus said you can't serve two masters. You have to choose. You have to decide whose bread line you will stand in.

Bernard Shaw, in his masterful play "Joan of Arc", has her facing the stake and speaking to her executioners. This is what she says, "Yes, I am alone on earth. Do not think that you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone...it is better to be alone with God; his friendship will not fail me, nor his counsel, nor his love. In his strength I will dare, and dare, and dare, until I die." Yes, she stood in God's bread line--she had the bread of life--and in the strength of that heavenly food she could dare and dare and dare.

So many people are not able to face up to life today. So many are not living victorious, triumphant lives. The reason is that they are more than mere creatures whose earthly needs must be met and they are standing in the wrong bread line. We are all children of God, made in his image. Until we are rightly related to him; until we have an intimate, personal relationship to Jesus, we can never live life successfully. The world's bread line will keep us physically alive, but only God's bread line--only him who is the bread of life--can give us real life.

So many today are hungry and thirsty for life to have meaning. Jesus says, "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden." Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Jesus says, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Here is the table of the Lord--God's bread line. It is for all who want life to mean something, for life to be related to God. "His friendship will not fail me, nor his counsel, nor his love. In his strength I will dare, and dare, and dare until I die."