

**I L-O-A-V-E You**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
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**John 6:35, 41-51**

We've spent a few weeks in the sixth chapter of John's gospel, and so far, one thing is apparent: Jesus is a carb man!!!

Jesus doesn't just love, he L-O-A-V-E-S. The abundant life is full of bread. Carb-lovers rejoice!!!

And you know what, I wouldn't disagree. As I think about the abundance in my life, bread has been a central ingredient.

When I was growing up, my mother would make breakfast for us each morning as we got ready to catch the school bus: Pillsbury biscuits, with cheese in the middle on Mondays-Thursdays, and prepared French-Toast-style with cinnamon and sugar on Fridays. And I have vivid memories of Thanksgiving dinners where my grandmother would serve sectioned dinner rolls with each section pre-sliced and buttered, and baked to perfection. And how many sandwiches have been made for each of us over the years by people who just wanted to make sure we didn't do our work on an empty stomach?

The bread from these meals was and is filling, but it's more than that. It's what this bread represents. Preparing bread is hard work. It takes care and patience and time. To make bread for others is to invest in their lives. When I think about my mother and grandmother making biscuits and dinner rolls, I think about the time and patience they invested over and over again. And I am reminded of the time and patience they have invested and still invest in my life. When I think about Communion bread, I can't help but think about the ones who prepare it, and the kind of investment they make in their communities of faith. When I think about PB&Js with no crust, homemade sausage biscuits wrapped in wax paper, or loaves of fresh banana bread, I can't help but also think of all the relationship hours invested into Girl Scouts turned grown-up-mothers, Sunday School pupils turned teachers, or Habitat Homes now hosting happy families. Bread sustains us.

God is also a bread-maker. In the person of Jesus, God made a tangible investment in creation. God became one of us. God experienced the range of human emotions: joy, pain, happiness, sorrow, loss, fear, hate, shame, alienation, grief, faith, hope, love.

Jesus was bread. When he engaged in heartfelt conversations with outcasts, when he healed those who were sick and possessed, when he mourned the loss of his friend Lazareth, when he prayed, when he experienced hunger and thirst, when he felt the wrath of the authorities, when he experienced death on a cross... God, in the person of Jesus, shared in the human experience. God's act of enduring life with those of us who live – that is, God's life in the person of Jesus – was and is living bread.

And in the sharing of bread, God found the most essential human experience: community. Jesus broke bread and drank wine with all shapes and sizes, and in so doing created a dignity and power that permeated all he encountered.

John's author tells us that those who recognized Jesus as the presence of God, found affirmation in themselves; they found credibility and confirmation in their status as children of God; they dared to

hope in God's possibilities. That hope was met in the love and loaves of Jesus. They found living bread from heaven.

Please note that distinction. Living bread. Jesus doesn't offer something similar to manna in Exodus. Manna was the kind of bread that offered subsistence. Manna helped the Israelites wander on full stomachs. But it also spoiled. You couldn't keep it from day to day. Jesus doesn't offer subsistence. Jesus offers abundance and vitality. Jesus is a bread that doesn't spoil, offered to wanderers and settlers alike.

Today's lection, like much of John's discourses, is tricky to navigate. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." And I love the directness of this statement. And I cling to that word whoever, because I hear "somebody, anybody, everybody" has access to this bread. Thanks be to God!!!

But then John's author offers a disclaimer: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me." And in this post, post-modern world, that's a hard thing for us to reconcile. The concept of being chosen, or of being elected smarts of privilege. And it smarts of a firmness, and a sense of precision that stands in stark contrast to both the mystery and accessibility of God. The God of Jesus is not to be owned by Christians any more than the God of Moses was to be owned by the First-Century Temple establishment.

I share a commonality with the Johannine community. I freely admit that I too was drawn to God by the source they identify as Father. And I have found sustaining, life-giving bread in that source.

But the Father I know is also SO big, and SO full of grace, and SO full of creativity. This Father is also comfortable being a Mother, or a Spirit, or a Lady full of wisdom, or something unbound to our restrictive labels and ideas. And this being, this source, this Word, this energy, this God is SO far beyond my comprehension, that I will not, I cannot, I shall not believe that anything or anybody can prevent God's desire to be connected to Her creatures and creation. Nor can I believe that the bread Jesus describes is reserved only for those who see God through the lenses of John. Or that such bread is reserved only for those who pervert John's gospel with patriarchal, inaccurate, cherry-picked proof-texts to ensure outdated systems of domination.

Jesus is not a baker who refuses to sell wedding cakes, nor an artisan who charges a 500 percent mark-up at Harris Teeter. Jesus is the proof of God's accessibility, openness, and creativity. And Jesus offers the kind of bread that's leavened by love. He offers that bread to all who would seek it, and even to those who wouldn't.

It's fitting then, that today, we celebrate Communion. In breaking bread together, we channel the hospitality of Jesus. In a mysterious way, God dwells with us, and reminds us of our status as children of God. No qualifiers. No disclaimers. No procedures. No red tape.

Just bread. Life-giving bread. And a celebration of life. Yours. Mine. Ours. Held in the hands of a loving God. Today. And every day. God L-O-A-V-E-S us, y'all!!!!

Thanks be to God!!!