

John 6:1-14

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Preacher: Guest Speaker

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Well, I wonder if you've ever had an upset stomach in the evening, after dinner, with pains that feel like hunger pangs, and thought, well, maybe I'm still hungry. And so you go back into the fridge and help yourself to a second dinner or a snack. And then, of course, you realize afterwards that I was not hungry. That was the wrong decision. And I feel worse off now than I did before.

Or consider another example. You enter into the evening completely wrung out from the tasks of the day, the worries of the day. And you think, I know what will make me feel better.

[1:52] And what will set me up well for the next day. Netflix or a show. And of course, you emerge afterwards from the show being just as tired as you were before.

Well, what I'm getting at is this. It's not always easy to know how to diagnose our hunger or satisfy our appetites. Whether this be physically, emotionally, relationally, spiritually. To know that you're hungry is one thing. To know what to eat, how to eat, where to find food is quite another.

In the passage we read in John chapter 6, we find the crowds who are hungry in every sense of the word. And they're seeking after Jesus. In verse 2, we read, And a large crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

So just imagine this force of 5,000 men. We don't know how many women and children, if the men decided to take along their young ones that day. But 5,000 men hiking up into the mountains, looking after Jesus, this one who performed these miracles, did these signs.

They're waiting to see what he's going to do next. And we hear after the passage that we read, that after the miracle was performed, more people show up in this place in the mountains.

[3:18] And when they realize that Jesus wasn't there because of, you know, a bit of a tricky move, and he's actually gone with his disciples on the other side, then it says the boats that had arrived actually go back across the Sea of Galilee, apparently with the 5,000 men. And so you have this 5,000 and counting force that is seeking out Jesus wherever he may be. And again, seeking out Jesus, that sounds like a good thing, does it not? In verse 26, again, just following the passage we read, we read about Jesus's assessment of the crowds. He says to them, You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

And he continues, Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man, Jesus, will give to you. And then, of course, later in his conclusion, he

says, I am the bread of life. And so Jesus has provided this miraculous feast. The crowds have satisfied their bellies, but it's left them hungry. Not physically, at least at first, but in every other way, still wandering about, seeking Jesus, somehow missing the point, eating, but unsatisfied, eating in the wrong way, seeking not finding. I wonder if we can relate.

In our passage this morning, as we'll take a look at together, Jesus shows himself to be the only one fit to feed you and me, the only source of true food. In our world, where we have many opportunities to chase after the promise of satisfaction and satiation, whether we're chasing this out in experts and influencers, in enriched and exotic food, in vacations and leisure or promising careers, hungering and seeking to satisfy our hunger, our hungers, others. We'll hear that Jesus alone can be trusted to provide you the food that you need.

He is the only one fit to feed you and I. He is the only trustworthy source of nutrition to satisfy all the hungers of our lives.

As we'll see, he does so as the great host of the banquet, of this feast that he puts on. And as we'll come to see, it's not just any banquet feast, it's actually a new Passover that he offers to these crowds.

[6:19] Now, as we start our story, I think this is the type of thing we're supposed to be thinking about. Many of us have had that moment where our much anticipated time of leave or vacation comes.

We've, you know, sent the last email, we've cleared out our inbox. If anyone actually clears out their inbox nowadays. We've done everything we need to check out. We go on vacation, wherever that may be, however that may be.

The sunglasses are on and the sun hat is on, whether literally or figuratively. We're ready to be checked out. And then, of course, the call comes. The notification comes. I don't know about you, but that Outlook notification, which I have since silenced from my phone, if I hear it on somebody else's phone, it still sends shocks of distress into my heart from an earlier time of employment.

This is the sort of thing that we're supposed to be thinking about when the crowds arrive on the scene with Jesus. Jesus has just been in Jerusalem. He's had a very, very intense time, a clash with the religious elites, who, his own people who have not accepted him, who reject him. And so he goes away, he retreats, goes up onto the mountain to spend time with God, to spend time with his disciples.

He goes quite far away to do this. And then as he starts teaching his disciples, we read in verse 5, What does Jesus do? Jesus starts making plans for his feast. Without skipping a beat, without trying to get out of it, without suddenly putting up his out-of-office notification, Jesus sees exactly what needs to be done.

[8:17] And so he turns to his disciple, Philip, and says, Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat? Now, there's a moment that seems to happen often in my household where my wife and I are inside, and the kids are outside. They've collected other kids, other neighbor kids, to play with them.

And all is going well. We have this wonderful moment of peace and tranquility where we can accomplish far more than we could have asked or imagined, given the prospects of the day. And then there's that moment where we see through the window the children coming back with the neighbor kids. And they're hungry, and they're thirsty. And my wife and I have very different inclinations in that moment. One of us thinks, Well, we've got to stick to Plan A. There's no harm in locking that door, sending them back out.

They'll do just fine. And the other, of course, opens up, whips up whatever there is to be whipped up in the house, and serves a meal, whatever we can provide for the hungry little mouths.

Like the great master of the banquet, Jesus, in a sense, cannot help but host. He must provide for us, his people. Even if the crowds will turn on him by the end of this very chapter, Jesus cares for these people, every part of them. It doesn't matter that they, you know, should have packed the lunch that day. Jesus is the one who will always come ready to serve, whether we deserve it or not, whether we're ready for it or not, whether we'll understand what it means to eat from his hand.

And it's not only how he hosts that we see in this passage that shocks us. It's also who he hosts.

[10:34] We read in verse 4, Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews was at hand. And so it's festival and feasting season. At Passover, all those with means would go to Jerusalem, singing the Psalms of Ascent, and they

would be celebrating God's rescue from Egypt. At the same time, mixed up with that celebration, they would be longing for God's rescue from Rome. And this was the great pilgrimage festival of the year where the city could swell two to four times its size. And so it's quite a, you know, exciting place to be. There's a lot of energy, there's a lot of fervor.

But we hear in this passage that Jesus essentially gets out of Jerusalem right before Passover. You might say that he was heading the wrong way. And so this passage reads somewhat as a protest. Jesus spends Passover away from the pomp and festivities, hosting his own sort of banquet. Not for the rich, not for the wealthy and powerful, but he does it for the masses. He does it for the hungry, the restless, the unrepresented, the disenfranchised.

Now I remember being a youth at camp. I was probably the age of 12 or so. And there was an 18 year old who was the cool kid. He was good at basketball, and he was charismatic. And in the eyes of a 12 year old, what more could you need in life?

And for whatever reason, he decided to take me under his wing. He put me on his two-on-two basketball team for the tournament. He was always genuinely happy to see me and to hang out.

[12:29] And I thought, well, how cool is this? I don't know what this guy sees in me, but I know that when he's with me, I feel like a million bucks. That was a couple years ago, so I don't know, adjusted for inflation, what a million bucks would be today, but you get the idea. This is the type of gracious invitation that we all receive from Jesus.

We cannot comprehend why he chooses us, why he seeks us out, why he wants to be with us, but he does. And his love and his pursuit are genuine. If you feel missed, passed over, which we all do at some point, know that Jesus, the king of the world, seeks you out.

That Jesus is the leader that does not move in elite circles, but seeks out those on the periphery, and he sets a meal before us. As I said, he is the only leader fit to feed you and I.

When I think about leaders today, many leaders today who have just written a book, maybe, and they go across the country to spread a message. They may drop in and out of events that have been planned for months by other people focused in that domain. All the logistics are in order, and they come in and they spread their message, convince hearts, shake a few hands, and they're out of there.

And you'd imagine how uncomfortable we would all feel if they somehow got kind of pushed behind the tray of food, and they're expected all of a sudden to start feeding people, or when things are late, they're making logistical arrangements. We would say, no, that's not appropriate for that type of leader.

[14:24] They've come to do something very specific, and we want to help them to do that. And they might think to themselves, I think my time is a bit more important than doing those things. In contrast, of course, we see Jesus caring not only about what people think, and what they believe, but he also cares about their stomachs. He says to Philip, where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat? He cares that while the religious center feasts, the masses are without a festival. Jesus serves the crowds who are pushing, who are hungry, and who are restless.

This makes me think that just how every leader, no matter how great their message is, in a certain extent, will disappoint us because they were not to meet our deepest longings. And if you go out looking for leaders, influencers, wherever you look to satisfy your hunger, to satisfy this ultimate hunger, you will leave disappointed. You will leave more broken and with more misdiagnosed hunger than when you came.

So Jesus shows us he is the true leader, the only leader that deserves your following, your discipleship, for he cares for you, every part of you. Now some commentators pick up on this fact that Jesus has the people sit down. Before leaving, George said that the people sit down so that they can see the miracle, which is a good point, right? Otherwise, how would they have been able to see what happened? Maybe somebody arrived with a warehouse full of food, who knows? So they were able to see it. But something else that's going on is that it says that Jesus has the people sit down, noting that there was much grass in the place. Now I think the author's point is not simply that the people were trying to avoid stubborn grass stains on tunics. The point is that we're supposed to think of something, familiar words that have come before. In Psalm 23, we read that,

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me by still waters. He restores my soul. Jesus comes to the crowds and he is indeed the good shepherd, the great host of the banquet. And now we'll look at this element of Passover. So Passover feasts happened all around ancient Israel, but there was one main thing other than the crowds that distinguished the Passover feasts from Jerusalem and elsewhere. And it's this, the sacrifice, obviously, could only happen in Jerusalem. When I was in university, a friend and I were invited by my Jewish professor to her home to celebrate Passover. And it was a beautiful evening. [17:53] A great kindness of my professor and we were welcomed into this rich and meaningful liturgy and tradition. But I was struck by the fact that this was very much, in a sense, the Passover of Passovers outside of Jerusalem. The father who led the prayers, because there are many prayers, and because he wanted to have read through all of them, he, you know, read in such a way that was almost on fast forward. I mean, it was probably a great kindness to us so that we wouldn't be there for, you know, a very, very long time. But we got through it at an extremely quick pace. And the point being to all of this, there was no lamb, right? There was no lamb.

Conversely, in this passage, Jesus, in intentionally holding an alternative Passover feast out on the periphery, Jesus is telling his disciples and the crowds something very meaningful, something that I've missed in the many times that I've read this passage and that I've come to see now.

He's telling his disciples and to the crowds that he himself will provide the Passover meal. That Jesus is preparing his people for the day when he himself will be the Passover lamb sacrificed to take away the sin of the world. So did you get it? This meal that satisfies us, that he gives to us, is his sacrifice, sacrificial death for us. It's the only meal that doesn't have us coming back for more, because it's the perfect meal. You won't get it anywhere else.

It's what we need to be reconciled to God to bring us back to the table and to eat with him. And so the, and the crowds, they get it, kind of, right? They, maybe, they, they, they half get it. They see that something's going on. This is not just a random miracle. It's not just kind of a, um, uh, yeah, um, this random feeding that happens just because they're hungry. Jesus is doing something deeply symbolic and, uh, and powerful. He's showing himself in essence to be the second Moses. Jesus. The one who made a new manna in the desert, this time in the wilderness, uh, or at least in a mountainous area, the one who would provide a new Passover feast. And this is exactly what they see.

[20:42] And so in verse 14, we read, when the people saw that the sign, the sign that he had done, they said, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. And this is a direct quote from Deuteronomy, with the expectation that a prophet like Moses will come again to God's people.

But as we've seen, their hunger is misdiagnosed. They're looking for the wrong kind of bread. In verse 15, we pick up the story, perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king. Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. So the 5,000 men and counting, you know, half decent potential guerrilla force in the making against Rome, perhaps of eager recruits willing and able to serve the right leader. They didn't want to believe Jesus in what he was saying.

They wanted to use Jesus in the way that they thought was best. And so this passage that we've read this morning, it suggests to us that there's a way somehow to be fed by Jesus, but somehow miss the real nourishment that was intended.

Our stomachs convinced of what we think we need, we seek food that perishes. To modify St. Augustine's famous prayer, our hearts are hungry, Lord, until they find their food in you.

And so what does it mean, just in our closing moments together, what does it mean that we can go to Jesus and miss the nourishment that he provides? And there is one caveat, I think one thing that can be misunderstood in all of this.

[22:39] He feeds us through all sorts of ways. He feeds us through word and sacrament. He feeds us through his gifts. But there's a subtle but massive difference between feeding us, between us feeding on the gifts directly, right? Feeding on the things of this world, the things that God

somehow, you know, many of which he has created and which are good.

There's a big difference between that versus feeding on him, including through his gifts. And so think on this question with me for a few moments.

How is it that we might go to Jesus in a way that we feed and is not giving nourishment? I was reflecting on my own prayers.

What do I go to Jesus to get most often? What are the dominant prayers that circle back in my repertoire? Think about how often I pray for safety, for comforts.

Maybe for a situation to be miraculously taken away from me. Maybe not altogether bad prayers. And yet when we think about the whole counsel of God and how much of the scriptures tell us that life will be difficult and that a life of discipleship will be hard.

[24:00] And that God wants us to have strength and wisdom, endurance to follow Christ into this messy world. How often do my prayers reflect the fact that I want Jesus to help me do the things that I want to do, to have the comforts and safety and pleasures that I want, versus going to him on his terms, understanding his will and his whole counsel, and being willing to hear from him.

A second, a second thing that comes to my mind. The crowds went to Jesus assuming that Jesus was there to fill their bellies, to do what they wanted him to do.

And so how might we leave our hungers, desires, appetites, unchecked, assuming that Jesus affirms those very things and more than that is here to help us meet them?

I think of kind of a type of Christian Freudianism, you might say, where some of us come to Christ thinking that all of our earthly longings will be met, right, for relational fulfillment, for career fulfillment, for, you know, self-expression, and we assume that all of these things will be met in our Christian walk, and we go to Jesus as long as it's working for us.

But of course, Jesus seems to allow all sorts of pain and disappointment in our lives that will cause us to hate sin and to cling to him. He corrects our desires over time to order our loves for him above all else for our good.

[25:38] Going to Jesus on our own terms can very quickly lead to leaving him without the nourishment and fulfillment that he has intended for us.

The good news in the passage that we've read is that Jesus is not a stingy, is not stingy with his miracles. He doesn't, he doesn't wait to make sure that we have perfect motivations and perfect intentions before coming him, but just like the crowds, we come before him on our best days and our worst days, and he puts a meal before us.

He spends time with us. He seeks to listen and to bless us and that we might hear from him. And yet, he wants us to feed rightly on him as the bread of life.

And so Jesus sacrificed his life to fix our hungers and to satisfy them with true food. His invitation to feed on the bread of life is open to you and to me today.

And so will you join me in confessing the ways that our hungers are broken, that we've tried to satisfy them in all sorts of areas and ways outside of Christ?

[26:59] Would we believe that Jesus indeed is the true source of real food? Would we go to him today? Please stand as we pray.

Amen. Father, thank you for this familiar passage. Thank you that you come to us as the bread of life and that you give us food that we can't get anywhere else.

We confess the ways that we look often for satisfaction and nourishment not from your hand, not from the gifts that you give, but somehow from these gifts directly.

we think time and time again that they will leave us satisfied. Lord, we ask that you give us eyes to see and hearts to hunger for things that will truly nourish.

Thank you for your sacrificial death that you offer to us, a table that will truly satisfy. We pray this in Christ's name.

[28:07] Amen. Amen. desde! desde