

***The Baptized Life -
Nourished By
The Bread Of Heaven***

John 6: 1-40

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The season after Christmas is known in the Church as the season of **Epiphany**. Epiphany is a word that means, *appearing, revealing*.

It is the season when we remember the appearing, the revealing of Jesus among the people through his years of ministry.

That appearing began at His baptism. And this year we've been concentrating on that - on baptism, the baptism of Jesus and the baptism that we receive as followers of Jesus.

We've gone back to the early days of the church when it was spreading quickly. Converts were flocking into the church. And they were being baptized along with their families - young and old together, parents and children.

We've talked about some of the pre-baptismal rites, including exorcism and declaring allegiance to Jesus.

We've described what the baptism looked like.

We also considered how the early Church made use of sacred oil - pouring it onto newly baptized believers as a symbol of the inner anointing with the Holy Spirit. That inner anointing empowered all believers in Christ to live as royal sons and daughters of Christ, as priests for the Lord, and prophets who speak the Word of God.

Today the final step. After all the speaking and robing and splashing and anointing and praying – after all that, the believers would move into the Sanctuary. Long-time and new believers in Jesus, young and old, all would gather together and share Holy Communion.

From the baptismal font to the Communion table.

The one led right to the other.

As baptism represents the beginning of the new life of the Christian, so Communion is the nourishment of the life of the Christian.

In the earliest days of the Church all believers would make that move, and make it immediately. Old and young, men and women, all believers together would go on Baptism Sunday, in the early Church - Easter Sunday - they would, as one big family, go from the baptism chambre to the Communion Table.

Holy Communion - the Sacramental continuation of the life of the believer that is celebrated in its beginning at Baptism. Two sacraments - inseparable.

And so, this Sunday morning in February, 2006, I call you to come to Communion to be nourished.

Come to eat that your soul, baptized and confessing believer, may live.

Come to the offer made by Jesus in John 6.

Ah - it is a passage of miracle nourishment, care and life.

And at the very centre is Jesus,

explaining it all to those too spiritually fogged in to be able to see it.

Verse 35: *I am the bread of life.*

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.... anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.

Come - he offers.

You MUST come! For -

If you do **NOT** come, you cannot live.

If you do not feed from Jesus, you will die!

His is not some spiritual diet plan that we may like or not like;

that we may choose to pick up or not;

that we may modify or adapt as we desire.

No - it is essential.

Take Jesus in, feast on Him, and you will live.

Stuff your soul with something else, and you will die.

Take Jesus in.

That begins with turning our backs on Satan,
and surrendering our lives to Christ.

It is then pledging to follow Him in obedience - always; publically submitting ourselves fully to Jesus.

If we have not been baptized when we were infants, then being baptized.

If we were baptized as infants, it is through public profession laying hold of the promises made when we were baptized, and claiming these promises of life for our own.

It is then giving every corner of our life to Jesus.

Take Jesus in.

You have seen the commercials for Gatorade on TV.

They ask, "Is it in you?"

We might ask the same thing today of all of us who follow Jesus.

Is He in you?

Friends, in case you haven't noticed we live in a secular nation.

Do you know, at its essence, what secular means?

It means that God has been removed from the very centre of life.

When God is removed from the centre, anything else can go in.

The search for pleasure.

The creation of wealth.

The grabbing for power.

Jesus calls us to fight against that with everything we have.

To take Him in,

right into the very centre

right into the very pores of our being.

We take Him in when we come to worship.

We take Him in as we begin each day with a personal moment of prayer and surrender.

And when, in the middle of the day,

sitting at your desk

driving in your car

strolling through the mall

entering the movie theatre

we remind ourselves that Jesus is with us.

and breathe a word of welcome to Him

say a sentence of thank you.

We take Him in when we look at the WWJD bracelet on our wrist and pray for Christ's guidance in making a decision or taking some course of action.

We take him in.

As one person said to me recently, "I've been chasing. My whole life I've been chasing. And I've got just about everything I chased - a home, a wife, kids, a nice car. But I kept coming up empty. I went to booze. Still came up empty. I'm here now - in church, because I think that the Higher Power that God gives is the only thing that can fill me up, that can plug the hole in my soul."

That was his way of responding to Jesus' call - *I am the bread of life.*
And I guarantee - he won't be disappointed.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (v.35)

The Greek language uses a double negative to underline the point Jesus makes in v.35 -
Whoever comes to me will not ever go hungry - no way!

It may not be great English grammar.
But it's good Greek.
And it emphasises the point.

*I am the bread of life -
a source of nourishment for your life that will never leave you empty, never leave you needing more,
that will never let you starve.*

We can try to fill our lives with work, hoping that achievement and success will make that inner restlessness, that inner gnawing, that inner hunger go away. But the harder we work, the hungrier we get. No amount of recreational therapy - be it gold medal sports or exotic cruises - will plug the gap. Doesn't matter how many friends or relationships you've got, trying to find in another what we are lacking in ourselves, the spiritual hole in the soul will still be there.

Human beings are essentially spiritual creatures. Far beyond being an intricate mass of DNA with a life span of some 80 years, each and every human being is a unique cosmic creation, a body with a soul woven into it - an eternal being given life by God, a life that carries on long after the body has died.

As eternal beings we **must** have a connection with God, every bit as much as our body must have food in order to survive.

It is this eternal, vital life connection that is symbolized, pictured, dramatized, and somehow made spiritually real for us at Holy Communion.

At the end of his life on earth, Jesus gathered around a table with the disciples, gave thanks and broke the bread. He poured the cup. Shades of John 6. But now going deeper. "Eat... Drink," says Jesus. "This is my body and blood, for you."

And the entire baptized community of faith is called to respond.

Called to respond with hungry hearts and thirsty souls - open and ready to receive whatever nourishment and encouragement and hope and comfort and inner strength and new courage and renewed forgiveness that Jesus may have to offer.

All of it as pure gift - from the Lord to us.

"*What must we do to be doing the works of God,*" the people asked Jesus. (v.28)

Jesus could have replied with the Ten commandments or the two commandments to love God and love the neighbor.

He could have. But He didn't.

Because, you see, it is not our works but God's work that counts. It is not the works we do for God, but the work God does for us that feeds forever with imperishable food.

Jesus is God's gift to us.

We no more work for the food that feeds forever than the crowd of five-thousand labored for the barley loaves and fishes.

"*This is the work of God: that you believe in the One he has sent.*"

The work that feeds us with imperishable eternal food is no work at all on our part. It is Christ's work accomplished. All we need to do is hold out empty hands and hearts, hold them out that He may fill them.

And fill them He will, Jesus:

Bread with a capital B, giving life with a capital L.
filling our souls with holy vitality and power.

So come, believers.

Somehow, in the mystery of faith, Jesus will be present.

And your soul, baptized believer, will be strengthened.

That you may remember and live out your baptism with holy vigour.

And if you haven't made that commitment -

- Perhaps never stood up publically and laid hold of the promises made to you when you were baptized as an infant

- Perhaps never having been baptized and being brand new to faith

If that is you, may I encourage you to think about making a public stand.

As you witness others taking in the bread, and drinking the cup, know this -

Jesus is calling you.

He wants you to be part of that Community of believers.

He wants to fill you.

And He is waiting for your response.

I encourage you to talk to me after the service, or Pastor Ron, or anyone you see walking around with a name badge. Or head to the prayer room and speak to one of the prayer partners.

So that next time there is Holy Communion, you too may participate, and share in the fullness of God's sacrament riches for us.