



**Plymouth Congregational Church**  
**2001 E. Grand River Avenue**  
**Lansing, MI 48912**

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## **FROM PLYMOUTH'S PULPIT**

### **“SOUL FOOD”**

Rev. Joy A. Baumgartner, Interim Senior Minister

**GOSPEL LESSON: John 6:30-51**

John's gospel, written so long after the others finds this author addressing questions and issues that arose many years after the death of Jesus. In John, we find stories and words attributed to Jesus that were recorded in no other writings and woven into a Gospel. What we really have here are John's impressions and teachings about the meaning of Jesus' life and lessons and the direction the followers were to take.

In this story we find the crowd following Jesus and his disciples and they are asking very direct questions. They have seen him perform miracles. He has fed them, and they want to know what other signs he will perform to prove his divinity. And here he also gives them a hint of his coming death and resurrection.

But the big question: Isn't this Mary and Joseph's son? Isn't he just a carpenter's son? How can he say "I am the bread of heaven?" Who does he think he is?

So here he is, trying to explain that his time is different than the others God has sent. He is not Moses – leading them to a geographical area. How can he make them understand that he is not talking about manna – bread that would fill their stomachs. He's talking about a different kind of bread – the spirit of God himself! He is trying to fill their souls.

At First Congregational Church on Nantucket Island, every meeting ended with the holding of hands and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. It was a tradition there that bound them together and helped them remember that every decision made was not made by human beings alone, but with God guiding them to fulfill God's will. They saw this as a time when they were in conversation with God as well as one another. One day, one of the trustees asked me, "Why do you think there's that part about our daily bread? It seems to be out of context with the rest of the prayer."

It was a very astute observation. There are various interpretations of this passage. Some believe it is about asking for daily food – bread. Some believe it's connected to the forgiveness part and that we are asking for a daily portion of forgiveness or even punishment for difficult times. Actually, it is translated like this: "Give us this day our daily portion of God's Spirit within us and let us not fall into temptation but forgive us so that we can go on with our work on behalf of God."

You see, John is weaving his own teachings into this Gospel through the words of Jesus and his interaction with the crowds. John knows the questions that have arisen so long after Jesus' death. "Should we just forget him and move on now? Was he just a prophet? And what was that business of the bread of life and the story of the last supper? Why did he bless the wine and bread and share it again during the meal and say, "This is my body?"

You see, this passage had nothing to do with that last supper that was yet to come in the story. In this story, John had Jesus double back - all the way back to the story of Moses. Whenever they worshiped, they remembered God's love and saving grace. Through Moses, God led them away from Egypt and slavery into freedom but they also knew they went into the desert and into difficult times as well. Moses brought them along the way, fed them with manna from heaven and that phrase slipped off their tongue like honey it was so familiar. So John tells us that Jesus used that as a metaphor and gave them a new insight – a brand new paradigm.

John tells us that Jesus reminds them that it wasn't Moses who brought the manna from heaven. It was not Moses idea or Moses intercession that fed them – it was God. Their food came only from God. With that, he makes the connection.

Bread of God comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. That's it. That's the phrase that's important in this story. And then he uses words that eventually incite them to betray him. "Ego Eimi" he says. "I am. I am the bread of life. As God's bread, now I come to do the will of God – the one who sent me to help you believe in God's love. And by believing in that kind of love, even death cannot defeat you. You will have eternal life." By listening to his teachings, we find a new way to discover God's love.

They wondered, as we wonder even today, what in the world is he talking about? Even today, there is a dispute between denominations about the meaning of the bread and the wine.

Jesus was aware that the disciples were confused. John knew it so long after Jesus was gone and clarified it when he spoke of the flesh as being useless and that the words he spoke were about spirit and life. Spirit and life. Jesus predicting not only his own death but resurrection. It was never about flesh and blood – never about sustaining our bodies. Always about our souls.

As we pass the plate and the cup, we're not meeting any physical need – this is not a bread and wine tasting affair. THIS IS SOUL FOOD! It's about receiving the spirit of God into our hearts and souls. It's about recognizing that God lives within us and gives us the intellect and the heart not only to feel it, but to believe in it.

So why do we do this? What does the bread mean today? What sign will he give us? The story of Jesus life, death and resurrection was never about a physical being, never about miracles or lessons. It was always about the eternal love of God not only throughout our life here, but long after our death.

Today we gather once more and share in food for the soul – the spirit - the very heart of God. And we remember with every morsel, every lesson, every insight that comes to us – it's all from God. Let us eat together – be together – be one for Christ. Amen.