

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“Not the Pillsbury Dough Boy”**

John 6:24 – 35

August 2, 2015

I assume that most of us are pretty familiar with the Pillsbury Dough Boy. You know, the little roly-poly Pillsbury mascot, about yea-high... that looks kind of like a cross between a snowball and the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man? In TV commercials, he’s always getting poked in the stomach, and giving that little giggling laugh... “Hmmm-hmmm! Hmmm-hmmm!” You know who I’m talking about, right?

Well, I’ve often wondered, what would happen if you actually *baked* the Pillsbury Dough Boy? I mean, if you stuck him in a 400 degree oven for half an hour... what would you get? A cake? A cookie? A Kaiser roll? A blanchmange? The guy’s made out of dough... he’d have to turn into *something* like that if, rather than poke him the gut, somebody decided to bake him instead. Personally, I think that he’d bake into a nice, crusty, loaf of bread... perfect for ham sandwiches and French toast! And, in a pinch, you could even dice him up and use him for communion!

Okay, obviously, I jest! But, I really was thinking about the Pillsbury Dough Boy this week, as I reflected on our Scripture lesson today from the Gospel of John. Because in this text, Jesus describes Himself as “the bread of life,” and “the bread of God,” who has “come down from heaven and gives his life to the world.” What did Jesus mean by those expressions? In what way was His original audience, and we this morning, supposed to understand Him as heavenly bread from God... that gives life to the whole world? What was the point of this culinary reference to Himself and His ministry?

Well, clearly Jesus wasn’t comparing Himself to some animated advertising icon... and He certainly didn’t mean that He was planning to bake Himself up into a warm loaf of pumpnickel. No, Jesus was making a spiritual point about His physical presence... and what it would mean to the people who love Him and follow Him.

Now, if you were here last Sunday, you may remember that we talked about the fact that Jesus is, for us, the most fully satisfying meal that there is... because He nourishes our hearts and souls, and not just our stomachs. This was the point that Jesus wanted everyone to get with reference to His sign, or miracle, of feeding five thousand people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of small fish.

As you recall, Jesus had used His heavenly, miraculous power in order to meet the physical hunger of the large group of people who had trekked out into the wilderness in order to see Him and hear Him. And He’d then pointed to that act of miraculous *physical* nourishment as a “sign” to alert people to the fact that He could do the same thing with regard to their *spiritual* hunger. In other words, the Lord who has the power to feed your stomach with bread in the wilderness, is the same Lord who has the power to feed your heart with the gift of eternal life... and to bring you into the presence of Almighty God Himself.

Okay, well, what we have in our text this morning, is really just an expansion of the lesson that we read last week... but it’s expanded in a very important, and very specific way. I’m not

going to take the time to explain this in detail this morning, but in general, we need to understand that, in writing his gospel, John was very deliberately presenting the ministry of Jesus as something of a “new Exodus...” a messianic re-enactment of what God accomplished with the people of ancient Israel, way back when He led them to freedom from their oppressive Egyptian taskmasters.

For you and me, Exodus is a long book in the Old Testament; important mostly for bringing us the Ten Commandments and describing the institution of the Passover. But for Jews, and especially for the Israelites of Jesus’ day and earlier, Exodus was *the* foundational story of God’s love for, and deliverance of, His people. The story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land wasn’t just one biblical story among many, for the people of Israel; it was the most important story that there was, because it firmly established both Israel’s national identity, and even more important, their identity as *the* people of Yahweh, who heard their cries and gave them freedom. Bottom line: for ancient Israel, there simply was nothing more important than what God had done for them in the Exodus. And this understanding was still very much alive for Jewish people during the life and ministry of Jesus.

Now, there are many points of contact between John’s gospel and the Book of Exodus... and that’s not just an inadvertent coincidence; it’s an intentional act by John to help his readers understand that, what God *began* with the original Exodus from Egypt, in leading His people to *earthly* freedom in the Promised Land of Canaan... God has now *completed*, by leading His people to *spiritual* freedom in His eternal, heavenly kingdom. And God is accomplishing this, says John, through the ministry of the “new Moses,” His one and only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. As Moses led the people of Israel out of the physical slavery of Egypt and into the Promised Land of Canaan... *now* Jesus leads the people out of the spiritual slavery of sin, evil, and death, and into the Promised Land of God’s blessed and eternal presence.

The first Exodus, under Moses, was limited and contingent; the new Exodus, under Jesus, is unlimited, complete, and God’s final Word on behalf of His beloved people. And what we see in our text this morning, is an unmistakable allusion to that truth... and the fact that Jesus has come to give to us what Moses and the Old Testament Law never could: forgiveness, grace, eternal life, and the fullness of life in God’s presence; beginning right now, and going on forever. And the way that Jesus makes this point is by comparing Himself to the manna, the “bread from heaven,” which God sent to the post-Exodus Israelites in order to keep them physically alive in the wilderness... as they made their way to Canaan.

The people who were talking to Jesus after His feeding of the five thousand, asked Him what miracle He was going to do in order to get them to believe in Him (which is odd, since Jesus just *did* one of His most amazing and unforgettable miracles, right before their eyes!) And they reminded Him that their “forefathers ate the manna in the desert,” which is a direct reference to the Exodus story. To which Jesus responds: *“I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

The people then say, *“Sir, from now on give us this bread.”* And Jesus answers back with, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”* All of which simply means that, under the Exodus leadership of Moses, God provided bread in the wilderness to keep their bodies alive; but now, under the messianic leadership of Jesus, God is providing His own Son as spiritual bread to keep their hearts and souls alive.

So, when Jesus says “I am the bread of life,” He is saying *“I am the true, fulfilling, everlasting nourishment that will fill your soul forever. Once you have fed on me, once you have taken me into your heart, into your life... you will have all the spiritual sustenance that you will ever need. You will have the fullness of life which God has always intended.”*

Which, of course, is, in many ways, just what we said last week. Jesus is the One who is able to truly “fill” us; to completely nourish us, heart, mind, and soul; to once and for all give us that which not even the great Moses was able to do. Jesus is finishing what God has started; and when we partake of Him... we can finally be at peace. And, you know, at the end of the day... that’s what the whole gospel message is really all about.

As we come to this table in just a few minutes, and once again share the sacrament of communion; let’s keep in mind John’s beautiful image of Jesus as the new Moses... the One who gives us His very life to heal us, to nourish us, to make us spiritually whole. This is one of the key meanings of communion; and when we share that bread and that cup, we are reaffirming our solidarity with the Lord who came, and died, and rose again... that we might have life, and have it abundantly.

This is the gift which Jesus has given us. May we receive it; may we be nourished by it; and may we take our stand upon it; all the days of our life. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!