

Do Not Feed the Geese
[John 6:22-35](#)
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Last month and this month, we are looking at the events surrounding the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000. In this miracle, thousands of people gathered to listen to Jesus. They hung around until late in the afternoon, and Jesus's disciples got worried that the people had no food. So, the disciples told Jesus that he needed to wrap it up so that the people could go and get dinner. Jesus just looked at them and said, "*You* give them something to eat."

So, the disciples rounded up some loaves and fishes and said, "this is what we've got," and Jesus gave thanks to God and proceeded to feed thousands of people with plenty of food to spare. Last month, we studied the stories from the book of Mark that led us to this point, and this month, we will study the chapter of the book of John in which Jesus explains the miracle.

So in the passage that Brenna just read for us, we started by hearing that the next day, a big group of people went out in search of Jesus. They went to the place where he had given thanks, but it was clear that Jesus had gone somewhere else, so they began searching frantically for him. When they finally found him, they were surprised when he questioned their motives.

In light of this, then, let me tell you a little story.

When I was a kid (maybe four or five years old), we were staying at a hotel— I think it was in Charlottesville, actually— and there was a pond outside with a bunch of geese. I was pretty small at the time, but I knew how to read, and there was a sign that said, "Do Not Feed the Geese." I did not plan to feed the geese, but I did want to go down to check out the pond. My mom was with me, and she let me walk a few feet toward the pond. When I did, the geese looked up and started walking toward me.

At this time, I was not much taller than the geese— I'm still not much taller than the geese, actually— and when I saw them coming toward me I got really scared. I thought they were coming to get me, and I started crying. In fact, I ran to my mom and said, "But I didn't feed them! I didn't feed them!"

See, I thought the sign that said, "Do Not Feed the Geese" was a warning, like, "Do not feed the geese (or else they'll come after you)." But my mom explained to me that they were coming at me *because* they thought I would feed them. It wasn't my fault that they

were coming after me. Since people had fed them in the past, they thought that a person walking near them meant that they would get some food, so they started walking toward me. My mom explained that they didn't want to get me; they just thought I had food for them. In fact, the only reason they were coming after me was that *other people* had fed them. The geese weren't interested in me; they were only looking for food.

So, back to the story that Brenna just read for us. Jesus had just fed 5,000 people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and the next day, a crowd came looking for him. In fact, they came looking for him and noticed that the disciples had gone away in a boat. Nobody had seen Jesus get on a boat, but he wasn't there. So, they all started thinking about how they were going to find him.

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the Sea of Galilee is not really a big sea. It's more like a lake. From the shore, you can see most boats that are out on the water, and you can see some of the other towns around the shore. On a clear day, you can get a good idea of what's going on around the lake. I know a lot of you spend time on various lakes, so you can get the sense of what I'm talking about here. People who live on a lake have a sense of community with one another.

In Atlanta, I led a Bible study and one of the guys had us out to his family's lake house for a retreat every year. There was a pizza place on the lake, and every year we'd run into ten or twenty other church members at that pizza place. Last summer, I went up to Smith Mountain Lake with some friends, and while we were out on their boat, we crossed paths with some other church members who were out on the lake, so we hung out for a while. These people who were following Jesus may have been from all different towns on the lake, but they all knew each other because they fished the same waters. They walked the same hillsides. They shared the same stories.

So when Jesus had miraculously fed 5,000 people with a few loaves and fishes, the news spread pretty fast. By the next day, everyone wanted to go out and see this Jesus...but they couldn't find him. So, they went one way around the lake and then another trying to figure out where he was. I don't know about you, but if this weren't the story of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and how people came to know him, I would think it was a Benny Hill skit. People are chasing him all around the lake, and even getting on boats to try to get to him!

But there we have something to consider. This story starts with people in search of Jesus.

And that is the best place to start. Isn't that what we are all supposed to be doing? Searching for Jesus?

Yes, that is the best place to start. So instead of trying to sit and analyze this passage, let's just put ourselves in the place of those people back then. Let's put ourselves in the

sandals of those who are indeed searching for Jesus...

...so, first of all, why are we searching for Jesus? I know that most of us in this room—and most of those who are listening on the radio—have been followers of Jesus from a very young age. But, we live in a world in which fewer and fewer people are taught from a young age that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. In fact, a lot of people today aren't taught anything, and a lot of others are just allowed to figure it all out on their own, as if they can find out the best religion for them in an issue of Consumer Reports.

That's not all that far off from what these folks who were following Jesus were doing. Now, they weren't necessarily looking for a new religion, per se, but the previous evening, Jesus had had to escape from the people he had fed because they wanted to make him king. Then the next day, he has people chasing around the lake looking for him. Just like the geese at that pond when I was little, the people were just trying to follow someone who might feed them. If someone else were gonna come along later and feed them, then they probably would have gone looking for that person, too.

Jesus recognized this, so he was blunt with them: "you're just following me because you want food, not because of the sign that I performed." And it's true. Think about it. Let's put ourselves in their position.

Let's say one day someone comes to Danville and gathers a bunch of us at Carrington Pavilion. He's standing on stage with some assistants and they have a few baskets, but somehow they're able to feed everyone there.

Then, a week later, another guy shows up at the pavilion, and he's got a bunch of Food Lion tractor trailers with him, and he feeds everyone, too.

The next week, they both show up. Which one are you going to follow?

I gotta admit: I'd probably go to the guy with the tractor trailers! That looks a lot more like a sure thing to me than a guy who's only got a few loaves and fishes and already has 12 other people on stage with him.

That's the mentality that Jesus was dealing with here. Jesus had given them food to eat, but at some point, someone else was going to come along and give them more. Maybe it would be King Herod, or maybe one of the Roman officials who did give out food to placate the people. Maybe it would be another religious leader who would come along with more attractive and more plentiful food to satisfy them. To their eyes, Jesus was a simple wandering prophet, and there were plenty of other people out there who could have given them more food.

So Jesus points that out to them, because he wants them to realize that the food wasn't the

point. The miracle—the sign— was the point, and it pointed to him. Don't associate Jesus with what he gives you; associate Jesus with who he is. Jesus wants to fill us with Spiritual food...

...but even that can be problematic, because just like the people in the story, and just like the geese by the pond, we are prone to following whoever or whatever we think is going to feed us Spiritually, as well. It's easy to pick on celebrities, but how often do we see celebrities bouncing from one religion to another because they feel more fulfilled by different ones at different times of life? Even on a more simple level, how often do people in general bounce from one thing to another— hobbies, habits, friendships, relationships— because we feel more fulfilled by different ones at different times.

Now, I'm not necessarily saying that's always bad. In fact, sometimes we *need* to make changes in life. But the point is that we are prone to this kind of wandering, going around life's lakeside trying to find whatever is going to satisfy us.

So Jesus makes his point, and it seems that he makes it pretty clearly. He says, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

And then, the people even give a pretty clever and insightful response. They ask, "What work do we have to do, then, to get that food?" When Jesus says, "The work of God is to believe;" they say, "well, we believe that God gave our ancestors food when they were in the wilderness."

Jesus then says, "Amen, amen," which means, "truly, truly," but he goes on to say that "Remember: it wasn't Moses who gave you bread; it was God who gave you bread from Heaven."

The point wasn't the bread; it was who gave it. The point isn't the gift; it's the giver. What God wants to give is not simply physical food, but Spiritual food that never goes bad.

After all, we are always going to have to find our physical food somewhere. We are always going to have to find something to eat and drink. That's why Jesus says that our physical food perishes and spoils. It only fills us for a time, and there might even be times when we run short and go hungry.

Jesus, on the other hand, gives Spiritual food that can get us through times of plenty and times of want. That's why Jesus is the bread of life. Even when it looked like he had perished— when he was killed on a cross— he was resurrected and came back to life. That just goes to show us that even in the times that we might be most Spiritually parched, most drained and emptied of hope and peace and love and joy for what God has

given us...even when we might feel the most separated and distanced from God and most prone to finding other things to fulfill us, God is coming right around the corner with resurrection.

-to give us new strength and a more flourishing relationship with Him

But Jesus's point here is also that we don't have to wait until those moments to go looking for him. If we believe and trust in him, then we are already prepared for those moments. In fact, if we believe and trust in Jesus— if we are filled with the bread of life— then we might discover that it is in those emptiest moments of life that we are actually the most Spiritually full.

In closing, I would like to go back to the question that the people asked of Jesus: “what work do we have to do to get this food?” That's what we always want to know, right? What do we have to do? What's the five-step plan, or the six-month progress chart, to get me where I need to be? I was listening to a story from a priest in an African country this past week, and the priest said that it was amazing how many people in his village were starting to believe in Jesus, but it was frustrating that when trouble hit, many of them went right back to the witch doctor to address their needs. They wanted a potion or a powder or a ritual that they could do to make things better, and they were hesitant to let God sustain them through the trouble.

We don't have many witch doctors around here, but we do have idols that we turn to when we should really be filled with the bread of life that God freely gives. After all, listen again to what Jesus says:

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

It's not our work that fills us; it's God's gift...and that gift is the giver of life: Jesus Christ. Jesus gives the bread of life, and he puts signs in our lives to show us. By believing and trusting, we open our bodies to that food and our eyes to his signs. Believe, and be amazed at how full he can make you.