

The Bread of Life (1)



John 6:24-35

Year B Proper 13

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2
●	Andrew - the younger brother of Peter, one of the youngest disciples	●	
●	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	●	
●	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	●	
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past	●	
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲
▲	Nathanael - Phillip's crass bully of an older brother, who joins Jesus in search of redemption and nobler life		▲
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		▲
■	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		■
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples		▲

Scene 1

Andrew , Joanna , Mary , Thomas

{At their new camp at Capernaum, some of the disciples discuss recent events.}

Andrew Hey, guys. Is James around?

Joanna No, he went to go meet the crowd.

Andrew What crowd?

Thomas A bunch of people from the island followed us over, I assume to hear more from the rabbi.

Mary Or to see another miracle.

Joanna That *was* pretty amazing.

Thomas Don't forget, we're still not sure how he fed all those people. It might not have been a "miracle" miracle, if you know what I mean.

Andrew But the rabbi walking on water definitely was!

Mary *[to Thomas]* You believe that was a real miracle, don't you?

Thomas Yeah, I guess I can't really cast any doubts on that one.

Andrew Then why don't you believe?

Thomas Well, I *am* here, aren't I? I'm part of the group. I'm committed. Isn't that enough?

Joanna I think it *should* be. I hope it *is*. Take the crowd that followed us here. They didn't see him walk on the water at all. They only experienced the feeding. And who knows what they thought of that. Maybe they considered it a miracle, or maybe they had another explanation for it, like we considered. The important thing is that they're still with us. The important thing is that they were fed.

Scene 2

James , John , Judas , Nathanael , Peter , Phillip

{James, Nathanael, and Peter, who just came from an encounter between Jesus and a crowd that followed him to Capernaum from where he fed the five thousand, rejoin the other disciples at their new camp.}

James People are idiots!

Nathanael Not to mention gluttons. And freeloaders.

Phillip What happened?

Peter They followed us.

Judas *[with concern]* The Pharisees?

James No, the people!

John What people?

James *[impatiently]* The ones from the island.

Nathanael *[with some disgust]* You know! The ones we *fed*.

Judas *[in a little bit of wonder, not sounding negative about it at all]* All those thousands of people are here? Now?

Peter Not all of them. But a lot.

John *[with some confusion over why James and Nathanael are so negative]* That's wonderful. Isn't it?

Phillip Yeah, this is what we're hoping for, right? To get more followers?

James *[dismissively]* Not *this* bunch!

Judas What exactly is wrong with this "bunch?"

Nathanael Well, for one thing, they're only here for more food!

John Now, now. I'm sure that's not true of all of them. Or even most of them.

Peter Actually, the rabbi said it.

Phillip Said what? That the people were only following him to get more food?

Peter *[happily emphasizing every word]* Yup. To their faces.

James He didn't even wait for them to explain themselves. The moment they caught up with us and asked why we left, the rabbi fired back at them, "You're only following me because I gave you food."

John *[a little shaken and disappointed]* He said that? Are you sure?

Nathanael We all heard it.

Judas And you're sure he was expressing disapproval?

James Of course. What else would he be expressing?

Judas Well, I for one don't see what was so wrong with the crowd following him for more food.

Phillip Shoot, even *I* know what's wrong with *that*. They should have followed him for...him.

Nathanael And that's exactly what he said. He said they should have followed him for the signs he performed.

Peter [*cheerfully*] Even *I* got *that*!

John [*thoughtfully*] Even the signs...that's not exactly the same thing as "for him".

Phillip The sign in this case *was* the food, wasn't it?

James [*impatiently*] No, no, no! It's all about whether he's the messiah. *That's* why they should have been following him. The signs prove he is what he says he is.

Judas [*half to himself*] Actually, has he ever really said that?

Peter Said what?

Judas That he's the messiah. Unless he said it to one of you when I wasn't around, I believe he has yet to make that claim.

Nathanael He said it today! To the crowd.

John [*excitedly*] Really? What did he say?

Nathanael After he told them they were just following him for more food, he said they should be seeking the food that lasts forever -

Phillip [*interrupting*] "food that lasts forever"?

James His exact words were, "food that endures to eternal life."

Peter He really said that? It's what I thought I heard, but I couldn't make any sense of it.

Judas He was talking about spiritual food verses physical food.

Nathanael Right, and he said he would give that to them, because he had God's approval.

John Was that the sense in which he claimed to be the messiah?

James No, he got much more explicit later. The people asked him how *they* could get God's approval -

Nathanael *[interrupting]* Probably so they could make their own baskets of fish and bread!

James - and he said: believing in "the One God has sent."

{A pause while everybody considers this.}

Judas That's it?

James *[argumentatively]* Yeah!

Judas *[pointedly abandoning the question]* Okay, so what happened next?

Peter Wait, this is the part I loved, so I'm going to tell it. The next thing they did, after everything he said about how bad it was for them to come asking him for food, was ask him for more food!

Nathanael It was disgusting.

Peter It was awesome! Those people knew what they wanted, and they weren't about to let anyone, even the rabbi, talk them out of it!

James Wait a minute. When did they ask for more food? What they asked for was proof the rabbi was the messiah. *That* was disgusting.

John Why?

James Because he already gave them proof! By feeding them all with just a few loaves and fishes. And the dumbest thing was, they gave him an example of Moses proving his power by feeding the people with manna from Heaven!

Phillip Which is exactly what the rabbi did.

James Exactly.

Judas *[laughing]* Ha! I get it now. So they were essentially asking for more food, like Peter said!

James What?

John *[disappointed]* Ah, I see. Oh gosh, that's too bad.

James What? What are you saying?

Nathanael You were disappointed that they continued to ask for a proof when the rabbi had already given one, but it was worse than that: they weren't even asking for a proof. They just wanted more food! Asking for a "proof" and giving the convenient example of Moses' proof of manna was just their way of manipulating the rabbi into feeding them again!

James Wow, you're right. And I missed it - but Peter got it?

Peter *[affectionately]* My kids used to try playing me like that all the time, God bless 'em!

John *[with resignation]* Okay, so I guess the crowd was not in fact very spiritually minded. That's disappointing.

Judas Why?

Phillip It's obvious, isn't it? They should be thinking about higher things.

Nathanael Yeah, instead of stuffing their faces.

James Don't tell me you're on the crowd's side?

Judas I just think that food can be important, too. Not the most important thing, but still important. And from what I remembered about that crowd, some of them probably didn't have *any* food waiting for them at home.

John *[thoughtfully]* I hadn't thought of that. I'm surprised the rabbi didn't think of it.

James *[scornfully]* So what are we going to do? Abandon the mission and feed the poor instead?

Judas *[reasonably]* There's no reason we can't do both.

Nathanael You mean, suck them in with free food, then hit them with the sermon?

- Judas** Not exactly. In the first place, hunger and the mission are not totally unrelated. Poverty among our people is only as bad as it is because of the Romans. They want to keep us impoverished enough that we have to scramble just to stay alive, so we don't have the time or energy to educate ourselves and organize resistance. To feed the people is to push back against that element of Roman control.
- John** And if people are really scrambling, then it's going to be harder for them to hear what the rabbi has to say. It's hard to hear anything over the sound of your own stomach growling.
- Peter** That's exactly how my kids used to be! Sometimes, they could act like such monsters, and I'd have to go break up their fights and lecture them about being good brothers, and I'd think, "How did they get so evil? What did I do wrong?" Then I figured it out: they only fought when they were hungry! When a meal was late or we were out in the boat past supper time or out camping and didn't catch anything for lunch. So I started keeping "emergency" supplies with me at all times so I could say, "Hey, boys, how about a snack?" whenever things started heating up, and that would solve the problem every time!
- Phillip** *[after a pause]* So what happened with the crowd?
- James** They saw the light. *Without* having to be fed, I might add. After the rabbi told them about the spiritual food that would be better, they asked for *it*.
- Phillip** Are you sure they weren't still asking for regular food?
- Nathanael** No. They explicitly asked for "*this* bread". In other words, for the bread that the rabbi told them about.
- John** And what did he say?
- James** *[solemnly]* He said, "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.*"
- Phillip** *[in a quiet, impressed voice]* Wow.
- Judas** *[with some concern]* Wow, indeed. "I am the bread of life." But what exactly does that mean?
- Peter** That he's the messiah, of course.
- Judas** Really? The one who'll deliver the nation from Roman oppression? How exactly does it mean that?

John *[in wonder]* In some ways, it means so much more. Not just our deliverance from the Romans, but our very sustenance. And not just ours, but everybody's. The life of the whole world.

Nathanael Except the Romans!

James Yeah, the Romans can go to hell.

Judas *[setting aside his concern for the moment]* We'll see what we can do about that. In the meantime, we should prepare for tomorrow. I assume all these people will be showing up at the synagogue.

Phillip Oh, yeah. It's going to be crazy!

John We should warn the synagogue leaders. I hope they won't cancel our engagement to avoid the chaos.

Peter Are you kidding? They'll love the crowd. More money in their collection plates, right?

James *[to Judas]* Speaking of which: we're getting a cut, right?

Judas Of course. But I'm thinking...maybe we should spend the money on something special.

John What do you have in mind?

Judas Food. For the people. Not just the ones who followed us here, but the usual crowd at the synagogue.

Nathanael *[angrily]* Are you nuts? After their greedy begging earlier today - and after the rabbi scolded them for it - you're going to go ahead and reward them?

Judas *[a little angry in turn]* Did we not just talk that through? Were you not here for the discussion we just had? It's not about reward and punishment. It's about what can help us accomplish our goals!

Nathanael *[angrily]* I was here. I just didn't swallow any of your lame rationalizations.

Phillip Shut up, Nathanael! You're always bullying people!

James Hey! He's your older brother and you have to respect him! Plus, he's right. We shouldn't feed that crowd a crumb!

John *[desperately]* Please! Please! Can we please stop fighting? What would the rabbi think?

Judas *[continuing right on in anger]* The reason we keep fighting is people don't listen. They just blast away with their same old opinions no matter what facts they hear!

James *[indignantly]* What "people" are you talking about?

John *[even more desperately]* Please, everybody!

Peter *[in a booming cheerful voice]* HEY, BOYS!

everybody *[everybody ad libs something like "What?" to Peter in various tones of voice.]*
What?

Peter *[invitingly]* How about a snack?

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