

The Bread of Life (2)



John 6:35-51
Year B Proper 14

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	Beggar - a beggar with a genuine desire to hear what Jesus has to say	▲		▲		
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲			●	
▲	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	▲			▲	
■	Woman - a wealthy and skeptical member of the synagogue	■		▲		
■	Jesus	▲		▲		▲
▲	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		▲			
▲	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples		▲			
●	Synagogue Leader - the well-meaning leader of the synagogue			●		
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past					●

Scene 1

Beggar , Jesus , John , Judas , Woman

{The disciples wait at the synagogue for Jesus to begin his sermon.}

Beggar Thank you! Thank you! I haven't had a real meal in days!

John You're very welcome. But there's the man you should thank. Judas!
Over here!

Judas Yes?

John It was his idea to buy food for everybody today.

Beggar Thank you! God will reward you for your kindness.

Judas I hope he will. And I hope you'll stay to hear our rabbi speak.

Beggar Of course!

Woman You're wasting your time, you know.

John Huh? How so?

Woman This man you're trying recruit is nothing more than a common beggar! I see him out here every day.

Judas So?

Woman So he's only here for the food. He couldn't care less about anything your rabbi's going to say.

Beggar *[angrily]* You're eating the food, too!

Woman *[indignantly]* I had to rush out of the house this morning - to get here on time! - and missed breakfast. And besides *[to Judas and John]* I assume you paid for all this with your cut of the offering?

Judas Yes.

Woman Well, then I'm basically just eating my own food, because I put quite a bit into the offering. In fact, I'm one of the leading donors to this synagogue.

John Our intention was to feed everybody who wanted to eat, so you're both welcome to as much as you like.

Woman *[contemptuously]* You're not going to get anything out of him, you know. He has no money to donate to your cause, and if you're looking for recruits, you'll do better with someone who's done a day's work in his life!

Beggar I worked! I was a potter. And then I broke my arm and lost everything!

Woman *[argumentatively]* And had no friends or family to support you? No savings? No other employable skills?

Judas *[jumping in calmly to head off the argument]* The causes of poverty are complicated. The powerlessness this man feels is really something

we all share to one extent or another, under Roman rule. They *want* a certain amount of poverty, of hopelessness, in our society. It helps them keep control.

Woman *[coldly]* What are you, some kind of a radical?

Jesus *[entering and whimsically taking over the conversation]* Do you know what would be really radical?

John Rabbi! *[to the man and woman]* This is our rabbi, who'll be speaking today.

Beggar Sir! I want to thank you for this food.

Jesus You're very welcome, but I can give you better.

Judas Um, actually, this is it. We thought we should keep it basic. But if you like, we can dip into the treasury and make another market run for some fancier stuff.

Woman Why? You can feed him jellied lamb if you like. He'll be right back here begging tomorrow.

Jesus What if I gave him bread and drink that would last forever?

Judas *[muttering half to himself and half to John]* This again!

Beggar Sir, I would love to have this bread and drink.

Woman This is ridiculous! There's no such thing!

John *[to the woman]* He means spiritual nourishment. *[to the beggar]* I'm sorry, but he's not talking about physical food.

Beggar I know that! Do you think I'm feeble-minded just because I'm down on my luck? I didn't just come to eat. I came to hear your rabbi's teachings.

Jesus Then here it is. *[in a louder sermonizing voice that the rest of the crowd will be able to hear]* I am the bread of life! Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

Judas John, I don't think it's a good idea for him to promise people this kind of thing!

John Why not?

Woman Because it's crazy! Spiritual or not.

Jesus *[still to the crowd]* You have seen me, and yet you still do not believe!

Beggar But I do! Or, I want to. Just tell me, and I'll try.

Jesus *[continuing to the crowd]* All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

Woman *[in shock]* What???

Jesus *[still to the crowd]* And this is the will of him who sent me: that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

Beggar I don't understand. What is it you want me to do? What's the teaching?

Woman The teaching is blasphemous, that's what it is!

John No! No! How is it blasphemous?

Woman He's claiming to be...I don't know, some kind of prophet or messiah. "I have come down from heaven." What does he mean by that?

Beggar *[with genuine curiosity]* And what does he mean by eternal life? Please, I just want to understand.

John *[a little overwhelmed]* Um. Uh, maybe Judas here can help to explain. Judas?

Judas *[also confused, half to himself]* "I will raise them up?" What does that mean? And what's "the last day"?

Scene 2

Joanna , Matthew , Thomas

{Meanwhile, some of the other disciples chat at the camp.}

Joanna How's it going?

Thomas Good, I think. We dropped off the food, and it was a big hit.

Matthew That was a clever ploy. The way to a man's...anything! heart, mind, or soul - is through his stomach.

Joanna I think it was more than a ploy. It's about ministering to the whole person.

Matthew Then it was a doubly good idea.

Thomas Triply, actually. We really scored points with the synagogue officials. I think we're going to be asked back often.

Joanna So the sermon went well?

Thomas I have no idea. Judas sent us back before the rabbi got started.

Joanna *[with some concern]* Ah. Okay. *[after a pause]* Do you know what he was planning to preach on?

Thomas Still no idea.

Matthew What are you worried about?

Joanna Did you hear about what he said to the crowd yesterday?

Matthew About being the bread of life? Yes.

Joanna And that didn't worry you at all?

Matthew No, why should it?

Thomas Wait a minute. He said what?

Joanna That he was the bread of life. That whoever believed in him would never go hungry.

Thomas *[thoughtfully]* Wow.

Joanna You see the problem?

Matthew I don't. He meant it spiritually, of course.

Joanna Of course! But you don't see a problem with that?

Thomas It's quite a...big claim.

Matthew So? Big is good.

- Joanna** I'm not sure if it's quite the *right* claim. When I first heard about the rabbi, I thought he was an interesting teacher. Now that I'm here, I think he might in fact be the messiah, the one who'll deliver Israel. But what does it mean when a man starts claiming he can satisfy the world's spiritual hunger? Doesn't it seem a little egotistical at the least? And...I don't know...a little loony at the worst?
- Matthew** It depends on what you think the Messiah is. I know that Judas is all about him being a political and military leader, and that's fine. But I think we can't be free until we're right with God. So I want to hear *more* spiritual talk from the rabbi. Otherwise, maybe we can overthrow the Romans, but we won't be any better in their place.

Scene 3

Beggar , Jesus , Leader , Woman

{Back to the synagogue, where the crowd is still buzzing about the accusation of blasphemy.}

- Jesus** *[in a loud voice to the crowd]* Stop grumbling among yourselves! No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. As it is written in the prophets: "They will all be taught by God."
- Woman** *[to the synagogue leader]* You've got to shut this man down! He's uttering blasphemy!
- Leader** Now, now. Let him have his say. *[to the crowd]* Please, everybody!
- Beggar** I don't understand what he's saying. I don't know if it's blasphemy, but it seems all a jumble. What was that about the prophets?
- Leader** I think it's Isaiah writing about the future redeemed Israel.
- Woman** Then he's claiming to be the messiah!
- Leader** Not necessarily.
- Beggar** *[in wonder]* Is it possible? Can it be I've lived to see the Day?
- Jesus** Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

{The crowd goes into an uproar, during which the woman, the beggar, and the synagogue leader talk among themselves.}

- Woman** How much clearer can it be? He says he came down from heaven. He says he can grant eternal life. He quotes that scripture. Now do something!
- Leader** Maybe you're right. People are certainly getting upset.
- Beggar** But what if this is it? What if this is the great Day of the Lord?
- Woman** Don't be ridiculous. The man's a carpenter's son, for goodness sake. From Nazareth! He tried to carry on the family business, but failed, so he took up itinerant preaching. Were you aware of *that* when you invited him to speak here?
- Leader** *[shaken]* Uh. No. Are you sure?
- Woman** I'm *from* that godforsaken dump. I've still got family there, and they told me all about this guy. My cousins know his parents!
- Beggar** I don't understand what his upbringing has to do with his teachings.
- Woman** You don't understand a thing!
- Leader** Now, now, let's not stoop to personal attacks.
- Beggar** *[humbly]* Actually, it's the truth. I *don't* understand these teachings. But I'd like to. Couldn't we just let him finish?
- Woman** No! We cannot permit him to continue spouting this dangerous rubbish. *[to the synagogue leader]* I warn you! I've got connections at the Temple, and I *will* report this if that man is allowed to speak one more word.

Scene 4

John , Judas

{Afterward, Judas and John discuss the day's events.}

Judas "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." What do you make of that?

John I don't know. I suppose we're all aware we might have to sacrifice our lives for the cause.

Judas Yes, but "for the life of the world"? I don't think he's talking about simple martyrdom. Especially in the context of everything he said today.

John I was deeply inspired by what he preached today.

Judas Yes, I know you're very devoted to him. Maybe his teachings really do fill you with a kind of spiritual life that never fades. But I joined up because I thought he might be the savior of Israel. And he didn't sound much like that today.

John I believe he'll save the nation, and more.

Judas He didn't advance either agenda much today.

John He *was* shut down early by the unruly crowd. Maybe he'll make everything clearer tomorrow.

Judas Maybe. Or maybe he'll just make things worse.

Scene 5

Jesus , Mary

{That evening, Mary gets the whole story of the day from Jesus.}

Mary *[in a dreamy voice throughout, like a child being told a bedtime story]* Did they let you finish your sermon?

Jesus For today, yes.

Mary And what did you say?

Jesus I told them I was the bread of life that anyone could eat and never die.

Mary And never die!

Jesus I told them I was the living bread that comes down from heaven.

Mary Like manna in the desert.

Jesus Yes, except that those who ate the manna are now dead. Whoever eats the bread of my flesh will live forever, and I *will* give it -

Mary *[suddenly waking up and interrupting]* Wait! I don't want you to say that part.

Jesus *[tenderly]* I will give it for the life of the world.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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