

John 6:24-35 ²⁴ When the multitude therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. ²⁷ "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, *even* God, has set His seal." ²⁸ They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." ³⁰ They said therefore to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?" ³¹ "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said therefore to Him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

"The Bread of Life"

I've seen on the Yahoo! News several times this week in a study done by Leicester University that said Canada is the tenth happiest nation among the 178 nations of earth. Hmm, did you know you were that happy? You're even happier than Americans. They ranked twenty-third. I have to chuckle a bit when I see statistics like that. I mean, how do you measure happiness? It's hard enough to define what it is. This study based happiness on four indicators: access to health services, ability to acquire wealth, access to education, and life expectancy. Apparently the folks at Leicester define happiness as a long, healthy, and prosperous life filled with learning. What other definition would expect from a university study? Yet, is that what happiness really is? It is a very individualistic definition. What about family and friendship and God and service? Are these not also crucial to happiness whatever it is?

The CBC thinks so. A few weeks ago when Dana and I were driving back from Algonquin the CBC aired a phone-in show on happiness. They asked Canadians, you the tenth happiest country on earth, how they would define happiness. What was clear in it all was that Canadians say that happiness just comes about. If you seek it, you'll be miserable. It's definitely not a life of continual pleasure, because we tend to get addicted to the things that give us pleasure. Happiness involves being part of a healthy community, service to others, self-acceptance, and also thankfulness. Oddly, even the atheist said you had to be thankful. Interestingly, most of the callers included faith in God as crucial to happiness. Some did as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount and defined happiness as blessedness. In the end the sense I got was that happiness is a sense of contentment, or satisfaction, or being fulfilled.

Well, I mention all this stuff about happiness because happiness, or satisfaction, or fulfillment plays a major role in why this crowd of people came seeking Jesus. The day before they had been seeking Jesus to see him do miracles. But, then at the end of the day when they were all hungry Jesus fed this crowd of 5,000 on two fish and five loaves of bread and they were satisfied. Down south we call it fat, dumb, and happy. They were so impressed that they wanted to make him king. If he could make their bellies happy what could he do for their lives as a people? They were seeking a happier life.

When they found Jesus, he immediately pointed this out saying, “You are not seeking me because you saw signs, but because you ate the bread and were satisfied.” In other words, “I made you happy.” They were not seeking Jesus because they understood that these signs revealed him to be the Messiah, indeed the Son of God. They were seeking him because for a brief moment they were happy and they wanted more.

So Jesus continued to teach them. “Don’t labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures into eternal life that the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Jesus hits home here not only with this crowd but also with us. I can not think of a statement that would be more counter-cultural to our way of life, than what Jesus has just said here. He tells us not to spend our lives on pursuing what we think will make us happy for it is all perishable. Western culture thrives on the pursuit of happiness. The preamble to the Constitution of the U.S. as a historical document sums up in one statement what has been the heart of Western culture since the 1,400’s. It says every human being has an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Many have died and continue to die for these basic values. They are the impetus behind every Western government, our economy, our health care system. The Christian religion has even been co-opted into being about the pursuit and protection of life, liberty, and happiness. Yet, Jesus says that there is something greater that we should labor after. Life, liberty, and happiness are all perishable, indeed fleeting and perishable. They are not bad values. They are truly good. They just do not adequately guide us in what being human is all about. In fact, Jesus would say that life is found in dying to oneself. Freedom is found in serving. Happiness is the struggle of living a life of repentance. Blessed are the poor in Spirit.

We are created to pursue a relationship with our Creator, our heavenly Father. In Jesus Christ God has made this relationship possible in the midst of our lives of sin and death. Jesus is the space that God has opened up in his creation in the midst of humanity where we can truly be in relationship with God and be becoming fully human. He is the one upon whom God has placed his seal, the Holy Spirit. In Jesus, in being his disciples we enter a relationship with God the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the only place this is possible.

This is contrary to most everything religious you read today. If you go to Chapters and start browsing whatever books you find on Jesus, I bet they will overwhelmingly want you to believe that Jesus was just a special person who awakened to his spiritual self and his teachings (and not him) are simply one way

among many to become spiritual. That is one of the oldest false teachings about Jesus there is. Jesus calls himself Son of Man. If you follow his use of this title through John's Gospel you find he is saying that his is God the Son who was with God in eternity and who in Jesus Christ became human and lived and died for the forgiveness of our sins and was bodily resurrected from the dead and bodily ascended back into eternity so that now in his humanity, in him, we can share in his faithful and obedient relationship with God the Father sealed with the Holy Spirit as he was. He is the bread of life, in striving to be sustained in him, knowing him and living in his life, we find what it is to be truly human. That goes beyond happiness. It works something like this. By the free gift of the Holy Spirit the Father seals us as his own children just as Jesus is his own Son. The Spirit creates in us a union with Jesus Christ bond and a bond of love with one another so that we enter in, with, and through him enter into his faith-based (not feeling-based) relationship with God the Father on his terms.

Jesus goes on to teach that there is only one work of we should labor at and that is to believe in him. The one thing that God has given us to do is believe in Jesus. There are two ways we have to look at what it is to have faith **in** Jesus. The preposition **in** is important. The Greek preposition, *eis*, is used primarily to describe location or place; i.e., in the store. To believe in Jesus firstly means to that in him, in his relationship of Son-ship with the Father in the Holy Spirit is the only place where true faith is possible.

Secondly, to have faith in Jesus means to personally know him and through him know God the Father and his steadfast love for his children. The Holy Spirit brings this about as a free gift. From this personal knowledge arises trust. Faith as trust is something that we learn and grow in as God day to day, month to month, year to year proves his steadfast love and faithfulness to us. Finally, faith as personal knowledge and trust in God must become faithfulness. To have faith in Jesus is to live life on his terms. We won't know how to be faithful unless we live lives that are guided by Holy Scripture. The Bible is not a manual one how to be a lone ranger Christian. It guides us on how to live together as the people of God. Faithfulness is a community effort. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do all things together so must we do all things together and in particular we must read the Scriptures together. We come into relationship with Jesus in a community of believers whom the Holy Spirit has bound together in the love of Christ, a community that worships and prays to the Father together, a community that commits itself to live according to the scriptures, a community that thrives on repentance and accountability in accordance to Scripture. To be truly human is to believe in Jesus Christ. Amen.