

The Soul in Everyday Stuff: Bread John 6:35-59

If you were to pick an object to symbolize who you are, what would it be? How would you go about selecting it? What would it have to reveal about your inner world?

Symbols and images are the shorthand of the soul. We rely on them for simple tasks—like seeing red and knowing to stop—but we also need them to make meaning of our existence and to express the deeper, often wordless realities of life.

Jesus understood the power of the image. In the Gospel of John, he uses seven specific "I Am" statements to describe his identity. The very first of these is found in John 6:35:

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

Jesus wasn't just being poetic; he was connecting to the deepest hungers of his people. He gave them an image that would feed every generation that followed.

Bread is the ultimate symbol of survival. It represents our most basic biological needs. When Jesus calls himself the "Bread of Life," we hear echoes of the Exodus—the epic story of the Israelites escaping slavery in Egypt. In the wilderness, when they were at their most vulnerable, God provided *manna*, the bread from heaven. God became real to them in the chewing and the swallowing. God was as close to them as the food in their mouths.

By using this image, Jesus was reclaiming that history. He was telling a people living under the thumb of the Roman Empire that God was again redeeming them through a "ministry of presence."

This was a radical, empowering metaphor. Throughout history, bread has been a political and economic weapon. From ancient Rome to the modern era, those in power have controlled the grain to control the people. The Roman state even nationalized the baking industry to keep the populace dependent.

But Jesus offers a bread that the state cannot regulate.

The original audience of John's Gospel needed this message of hope. They were living through a time of persecution where faith wasn't a "nice idea"—it was a life-or-death risk. To follow Jesus was to put everything on the line. They needed to know that God would sustain them, not just in spirit, but in the very marrow of their bones.

When we see Jesus as the Bread of Life—the very essence of our existence - it changes how we see everything else. If we find the Divine in our "daily bread," we begin to see the sacredness in ourselves and in every person we meet.

The writer Madeleine L'Engle once said: *“Determine what you cannot live without. Then organize everything else in your life around it.”*

Is Jesus the bread of your life? Is his love as essential to you as the food on your table?

Guided Imagery Meditation: The Kneading of the Soul

(Invite the congregation to close their eyes, take a deep breath, and settle into their seats.)

The Grain Visualize a vast field of wheat, golden and swaying in the wind. Each grain is hard, individual, and full of potential, yet it cannot become bread until it is transformed. Think of your own life - the separate pieces of your day, your worries, your joys. These are the raw ingredients.

The Grinding To become bread, the grain must be ground. It must be broken open to release the flour within. Reflect for a moment on the "grinding" moments of your week - the pressures or the brokenness you've felt. In the hands of the Creator, this breaking is not for destruction, but for the making of something new.

The Kneading Now, imagine the dough. It is heavy and sticky. It requires the rhythmic pressure of the baker's hands—pushing, folding, stretching. This is the work of the Spirit in our lives. It is the "kneading" of our character, the stretching of our patience, the folding of God's love into our stubborn places. Feel the warmth of those hands. You are being prepared.

The Rising The dough must sit in the dark. It must wait. In the quiet, the yeast does its invisible work, lifting the bread, giving it life and breath. If you are in a season of waiting or darkness, know that the Bread of Life is rising within you, even now.

The Breaking Finally, imagine a warm loaf, fresh from the oven. Smell the richness of it. This bread is meant to be broken. It is meant to be shared. It is not a symbol to be looked at, but a gift to be taken in.

Jesus says, *"This is my body, broken for you."* As we move to the table, realize that you are not just receiving a ritual. You are receiving the very "stuff" of life. You are being fed by the one who promised we would never hunger again.