

August 1, 2021 Pentecost 10B  
Spiritual Carbohydrates  
John 6:22-35

*"I am the Bread of Life."* This is what Jesus says of himself in John 6. Our Gospel lessons for this week and the next 2 come from John 6, and we will hear Jesus say this more than once. In our Ephesians reading today, we hear Paul talking about a body—*"we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love."* (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Bread and bodies. So let's talk about spiritual nutrition. For *physical* nutrition, scientists tell us there are 3 macronutrients that our bodies need—carbohydrates, proteins and fats. That's our physical bodies. I think there is a wonderful parallel for our spiritual selves. There are things that make us spiritually healthy, spiritually strong, spiritually flexible and spiritually alert.

Next week we will talk about spiritual proteins, but today we are going to talk about spiritual carbohydrates. Let's first understand what carbohydrates do for our physical bodies.

Carbohydrates are one of three macronutrients - along with proteins and fats - that your body requires daily. There are three main types of carbohydrates: starches, fiber, and sugars. Starches are often referred to as complex carbohydrates. They are found in grains legumes and starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn. Sugars are known as simple carbohydrates. There are natural sugars in vegetables, fruits, milk, and honey. Added sugars are found in processed foods, syrups, sugary drinks, and sweets. I don't want to turn this into a science lesson, but there are couple of more things I want you to know about carbs before we turn to our spiritual discussion.

Carbohydrates are your body's main source of energy. They help fuel your brain, kidneys, heart muscles, and central nervous system. For instance, fiber is a carbohydrate that aids in digestion, helps you feel full, and keeps blood cholesterol levels in check. Your body can store extra carbohydrates in your muscles and liver for use when you're not getting enough carbohydrates in your diet. A carbohydrate-deficient diet may cause

headaches, fatigue, weakness, difficulty concentrating, nausea, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

And carbohydrates need to be used up through activity. If you eat a bunch of carbs and don't do anything, don't move or stretch or exercise, they just break down to sugar, and cause your blood sugar to go up and you get fat.

OK, that's enough science. What about these spiritual carbs? Let's look at this Bread of Life story in John 6.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus has met the immediate needs of a host of people. Those remaining after He fed 5,000 with a little fish and bread seek out Jesus. Jesus tells them, *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."*

The previous day, Jesus fed their physical hunger with bread and fish, and the crowd sought Him out once more. Jesus points them to their spiritual hunger, which is what He really wanted to fill. After all, the people were created to love God and love others as they loved themselves, and in chasing after other needs, they risked getting further from the real nourishment they needed.

So when he tells them, *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you,"* they turn it around. They miss the point and rather than focus on accepting what God gives them, they want to know what they can do: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" So Jesus tells them simply this: *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

Jesus compares this to the original bread from heaven, manna, with which God miraculously fed the children of Israel for 40 years in an uninhabitable wasteland. This was the daily bread that would come anew each morning, with enough to last the day. Bread in the morning, quail at night. This makes perfect sense nutritionally by the way. They get their carbs in the morning so they can use this up during the day and protein at night to rebuild (but next week is spiritual proteins, so I will hold off on that). Now Jesus compares the daily bread of manna, which God gave in the desert, to the Bread of Life, which God offers in Jesus Christ. Jesus says, *"I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

Get it? "I am the Bread of life." I am your spiritual carbohydrate. I am your source of energy. I am your fiber, your starch, your sugar. I am all you need to live, and without me, you can't live.

So how much Jesus do you need and where are you going to get it? Once a week in church to be fed by Jesus? Will that do it?

How would that work out for you if you did it with your physical body? "I'm just going to eat one meal a week and that will get me through." That would have drastic effects on your body. It wouldn't work.

We need more. Look at what Ephesians says again: *"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:1-3).

This is hard stuff. We need energy—spiritual energy. We need fuel—spiritual fuel. We need the Bread of Life Jesus.

Jesus says, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."* Yes, we get that here every weekend as we hear the powerful Good News spoken and sung and preached. We get it by coming to the altar and receiving the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. But there are also 6 other days that we need the Bread of Life. We get it by spending time every day at the foot of the cross soaking up the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus for us. For us! We soak that in every day and we get our spiritual carbohydrates that give us the energy we need to, as Ephesians says, *"live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

And we get it through the Word of God—here on Sunday as it is spoken and sung and preached. But we need more than one meal a week. So we take time every day to spend some time in the Good News God has given us in His Word. That's where we get energy. There's where we find the power and the peace to be who we are called to be so we can go about the hard spiritual service of being known by love and living by faith and being a voice of hope.

Remember something about carbs—they need to be used. If you don't burn them through work and exercise and activity, they just break down to sugar and make you fat. That's true in our physical bodies and true in our

spiritual bodies. We burn spiritual carbohydrates and spiritual calories by spiritual exercise.

Let's go back to Ephesians for a moment: *"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Jesus equips His church for *service*—for work, for ministry, for mission. Let's keep reading: *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work* (Ephesians 4:14-16).

That's spiritual health. That's what happens when Jesus feeds His church the Bread of Life and the church uses up those carbohydrates in service.

One more thing about carbs (both physical and spiritual carbs). Let's say you aren't truly hungry, but you have a bag of chips and you eat one—just one. What happens? You want more. You aren't hungry but you get that little taste of carbs and you want more. That's because carbs make you crave more carbs. Some of you might remember the Lays potato chip commercial with the tag line "No one can eat just one." It was true. No one could eat just one. Because carbohydrates make you crave more carbohydrates. That's also true of the Bread of Life.

So let's take this Bread of Life that we have been given today—these spiritual carbs, this spiritual energy, this spiritual starch and fiber and sugar—and crave more every day. Let's sit at the foot of the cross every day and bathe in the power that comes from it. Let's be fed by the Word every day. And then let's burn those carbs up in service as we are known by love and live by faith and are a voice of hope. Amen.