

August 8, 2021 Pentecost 11B

John 6:35-51

Spiritual Proteins

“I AM the Bread of Life,” says Jesus. We are in the second week of three weeks in John 6—the Bread of Life Chapter. So far Jesus has fed the 5000 using loaves of bread and some fish. Because He did that, He’s the most popular rabbi in town and people are hanging around. In last week’s verses, we saw Jesus moving the crowds from the topic of physical hunger, physical food and physical nutrition to the idea of spiritual hunger, spiritual food and spiritual nutrition. If you remember, He told them last week, *“Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”*

They don’t immediately get His point, so He spends some time teaching them throughout the chapter. Meanwhile, we have been having these epistle readings from the book of Ephesians for a few weeks, where one of Paul’s main topics is the body of Christ. We are a body—a body that is growing and being built up to be like Jesus and to carry out Jesus’ mission. So we have the topics of spiritual food and spiritual body. I thought this would be a great time to 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.

What do we need to take into our souls to have the spiritual strength, agility and alertness to be this spiritual body called the Body of Christ?

Last week we looked at spiritual carbohydrates. For our bodies, carbohydrates are our energy source. They give us what we need to be active. Last week we saw that the Bread of Life, Jesus, is our spiritual carb, our energy source to live up to this demanding calling He has placed on us.

Today we want to look at spiritual proteins. Physical proteins do a lot. They play a complex and critical role in our bodies. But to keep it simple, 2 of the main things they do is to serve as building blocks to repair our bodies and "messengers" that help our bodies carry out their functions. For example they repair muscles after you have used your muscles. If someone has a weightlifting routine, they learn that you don't work the same muscles 2 days in a row. They do upper body one day, legs one day and core one day. After a workout, your body needs time for the proteins to restore and repair the muscles. That's what proteins do. Proteins also work in the red blood cells to carry oxygen to all the parts of the body. They also help with digestion, they regulate hormones and they cause growth (did you know that your hair and fingernails are made mostly protein?).

Enough science. Let's move to more important topic of spiritual proteins and the Bread of Life, Jesus. Some of you might be saying, "Wait a minute, Pastor. Bread is a carbohydrate. How are you going to use it to talk about proteins?" I'm glad you asked. First of all, in whole wheat flour, especially in ancient grains, there is a good bit of protein. And if that's not enough, in the last verse of our reading, Jesus moves from the idea bread and introduces the new concept of His Body and Blood. This became a very difficult concept for some of His followers. We will see that in next week's reading and Pastor B can explain that one.

Back to proteins. They restore what has been lost or damaged and they carry messages so the body can function the way it is supposed to. So what is it that does that for our spiritual body?

Well, you already know. It's the Bread of Life, Jesus. The first thing Jesus does for us is restore us and make us new. Our condition apart from Jesus is death. Spiritually dead. That's what we inherited from Adam. Every person born since Adam has been born spiritually dead, spiritually blind, and spiritually empty. The only thing that can change that is the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus at the Cross. Hear Jesus' words again from John 6: *"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."* And a few verses later, *"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life... ⁵¹ I am the living bread that*

came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

That's done. Accomplished. Finished at the Cross. Given to you at baptism. No one can take it away. You are a new creation in Jesus. You've been restored to the life God intended. Nothing else need be done for that type of restoration and healing.

But this calling that God has placed upon us—to join Him in redeeming the world is hard work. The way Paul puts in our Ephesians verses is that we've been taught to *"to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."* That's challenging. To put in terms of our mission statement, living by faith, being known by love, being a voice of hope, and doing it day after day is challenging. It can leave us spiritually tired, spiritually wounded, spiritually bruised, and spiritually depleted.

We need, we really need those spiritual proteins that restore us and heal us and refresh us and make us whole. And again, those spiritual proteins come from Jesus. So daily we spend time with Jesus. We spend time at the foot of the cross being bathed in His mercy, His Grace and His Power. We spend time in the Word of God being fed. We spend time with other believers being supported and encouraged. And we let those spiritual proteins do what proteins do—they heal, restore and make new.

There are a lot of other things proteins do, but as far as spiritual proteins, there is only one more thing I want to cover today. Proteins make the body function the way it is supposed to function—they aid in circulation, digestion, breathing and about every other function your body does—all controlled by proteins.

So what makes you function spiritually the way you're supposed to? What empowers you to be known by love and live by faith and be a voice of hope?

You know the answer. It's Jesus. But I also see 7 different ways we interact with Jesus that serve as spiritual proteins (don't get scared. There

are not 7 more points to my sermon. These are short). I even made them into a bookmark to take with you. If you are watching online or reading the sermon at home and would like one of these bookmarks, contact Julie at the church office and she will send you one.

I should point out that this is not completely original to me. I was doing some research on an unrelated topic and came across an article written by Bishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Church. He called his article "The Way of Love." I have modified it and adapted it for our use and am calling it "Seven Healthy Steps for Following Jesus."

PAUSE: Stop and make room for Jesus

LEARN: Reflect on the Bible every day, especially the life and teachings of Jesus

PRAY: Dwell intentionally with God every day.

WORSHIP: Gather in your faith community weekly to thank, pray and draw near to God.

BLESS: Share your faith, unselfishly giving and serving

GO: Cross boundaries, show compassion and live like Jesus

REST: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace and restoration.

So there it is. Be spiritually healthy. Let the Bread of Life, Jesus, be your spiritual carbohydrate and give you all the energy and power you need. Let the Bread of Life, Jesus, be your spiritual protein and restore you and make you function healthily as the body of Christ. Then burn up all those calories doing the hard spiritual work of being known by love and living by faith and being a voice of hope. Amen.