

# Thanksgiving

## THE RECEIVING AND SHARING THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:25-35

Thanksgiving

Analysis by Steven Kuhl

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God has set his seal." 28Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" 29Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30So they said, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'." 32Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34They said to him, "Sir give us this bread always."

35Jesus 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."

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Perishing in the Abundance of Perishable Goods**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Enchanted by the Production of Perishable Goods*

The people called the “crowd” in this story were enchanted by what they saw. And why wouldn’t they be? They had been caught in the wilderness hungry; and with the scant resources of a school boy’s lunch, they (five thousand of them), had been feed-and with leftovers beyond belief! This crowd, too, was very religious. They had theological categories to describe what was happening. This must be the “prophet who is to come into the world,” they thought (6:1-15). This was God at work, and in biblical proportion. Naturally, they became enchanted by the abundance of bread. Though it is a mere perishable good, when it exists in that kind of abundance doesn’t it become the object of enchantment, the source of true, enduring, lasting, meaningful life? This crowd thought so, and the crowd today tends to think so, too.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Seeking Exhaustingly after the Producers of Perishable Goods*

Enchanted, the crowd became seekers, running exhaustingly after Jesus, this great producer of perishable goods. Their hearts were easily committed to this display of worldly power to produce, to this technology beyond imagination, to this technocrat who could produce miracles. “When did you come here?” (v. 25), they ask, as though they were wondering how much of their life had been wasted on other would-be prophets. It comes as quite a surprise when Jesus tells them they’ve missed the point. They saw the miraculous production of perishable goods but not the “sign.” And that was precisely the heart of their problem. Fixated on (trusting in) perishable goods, though they

are from God, the crowd could not see or receive the “eternal goods” being offered.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** – *Perishing in the Abundance of Perishable Goods*

Without receiving the eternal goods that are “signed” by Jesus, this crowd, enchanted by perishable goods, seeking perishable goods, even receiving perishable goods (for they did receive, just as their ancestors in the wilderness received, just as we receive our daily bread, and receive it in abundance)- nevertheless, without the eternal goods “signed” by Jesus they will perish in the abundance of their perishable goods, just as their ancestors did (6:49) For the ultimate threat to their life (as hard as it may be for the crowd to see) is not the lack perishable goods, but of the lack of eternal good before God, the judgment of God upon a sinful world (cf. 3:16-21, 36).

## **PROGNOSIS: Living Eternally-Even Now among Perishable Good**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Christ, “the bread of life” (v. 35), the Eternal Good Given in the Sign of the Cross and Resurrection*

Jesus is quite aware of how difficult it is for the crowd to see and understand and receive the “signs” he performs. That’s why he teaches the people, quite clearly, what is the meaning. “Don’t ask me for perishable goods,” he says clearly, “but the imperishable good.” And what is that? “It is me,” says Jesus, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus is the only “bread” that can conquer the crowd’s mortality and the reason for it-sin and the judgment of God. Of course, the “sign of signs” that Jesus is this kind of bread is the sign of his cross and resurrection. There, on the cross he takes upon himself the crowd’s lack of good, their perishability, their never ending hunger and thirst for eternal life, for a life that can endure before God-and

shows what kind of bread of life he is by rising to eternal life.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Seeking is Believing, Not Working (v. 29)**

The natural question that emerges now is the one the crowd asks: “What ‘work of God’ must we do to get this bread. What strings are attached?” (v. 28). Unquestionably, the whole deal sounds too good to be true. We know how the producers of perishable goods are never in it just “for us” but for themselves. Here comes the surprise: Here in Jesus, God is working totally “for us.” The subtle twist in Jesus response to the crowd’s question is key; there is no “work” God prescribes you to do. Rather, “This is the work of God,” that is, the work that God does. Therefore, have no reservations, believe it (v. 29)! Believe it and you have it. Seeking the imperishable Bread from heaven, Jesus, therefore is not a work we do, it is faith, the reception of gift offered (described here as “bread from heaven” and “eternal life”) produced by Christ in his death and resurrection.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Re-enchanted by Bread of Life (v. 34)**

“Sir, give us this bread always.” Note the change in the crowd. No longer are they enchanted by perishable goods, nor are do they exhaustively seek the producers of such goods. Now they take the stance of confident believers. What kind of ethos might this imply? To be sure, such re-enchanted people will find themselves with other people. Not, however, as an aimless, amorphous crowd, but as the God’s assembly feeding on Word and Sacrament always. They will certainly be receivers of this bread ALWAYS. But more, they will also live differently in the world. For no longer are they enchanted by perishable goods. It is true, however, that they still need such goods and use them in this life, but now they are more interested in sharing these

goods, as Jesus shared bread. Worldly, financial security is no longer what they “seek” or what they work for (v. 27). Rather, their work is now the “work of God.” And, in this sense, they work, in all they do, to be a sign of the Bread of Life. Regardless of their abundance or lack of perishable goods, those who have become re-enchanted by the Bread of Life use those perishable goods as a sign of the gracious work of God. Indeed, after being fed by the Bread of Life, at the sound of the words “Go in peace and so serve the Lord,” they let out a cry “Thanks be to God” and scamper into the world for that very purpose.