

Sermon Title: **“The Bread of Life”**

Bible: **John 6:35, 41-51**

When: on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost, August 11, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Before The Message

Two weeks ago, when I gave the message, I made a big mistake. When I shared many of the names of the small group workshops, there was one workshop called, “Expresiones de Amor: Fresh Expressions.” I shared it in French, but it is in Spanish, because it was about how to do bilingual gatherings, including ones with our Hispanic/Latino sisters and brothers. I am so sorry about my big mistake. Please forgive me.

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. My Soul Food

What is your soul food? What soul food feeds your body, your mind, and your spirit? When you are sick, what food or soul food do you look for? When I am sick, I tend to eat two kinds of Korean food. One is jeonbogjug in Korean, which is abalone porridge. This is the combination of thinly sliced abalone and soaked rice. Sometimes, we add vegetables, and abalone intestines. The other is samgye-tang in Korean, which is a Korean-style chicken soup. The traditional Korean-style chicken soup has the whole young chicken filled with

ginseng, garlic, jujube, and rice. Even during the hot summer, Koreans eat this hot chicken soup in order to recharge our energy and for bodily health. These Korean soul foods make me feel warm and boosts my energy!

As many of you remember, I went to Chicago to attend the School of Congregational Development last week. I thought that it would be okay to eat American food all day, but somehow I felt homesick, and I was looking for Korean food. Even though I could not have my Korean soul food and Kimchi, I was able to purchase some Korean snacks. Because I did not have a car in Chicago, I needed to walk about an hour round trip in the hot weather, in order to stop by the Korean Market near the hotel. To have Korean snacks was worth it in my hotel room, which soothed my homesickness. I do not know if my hunger for Korean food is because of my DNA or because of the culture that I was born and raised in. But I cannot help but confess that I need Korean food when I am sick and when I feel homesick.

2. Room for God in Our Lives

How about you? Do you have room or hunger for soul food? I believe that everyone has room for dessert, right? I believe that it is God's sense of humor to create room for dessert. How about your soul food? What is your soul food?

I believe that when God created us, God made room for dessert, room for soul food, and room for Godself in our lives. Today's scripture reading comes after the story of Jesus' feeding five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. After feeding five thousand, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." As we need to eat physical food for our body, we need to

eat spiritual food for our soul. That's because we have room for the Divine one.

When we are hungry, we can eat some junk food. It can relieve our hunger, but if we eat junk food only, our body will give us warning signs. When we are stressed, one chocolate might help us relieve the stress, but a lot of chocolate will not help us in the end.

How about our room for the Divine one? Some people might feed the space where we have room for the Divine one, our hunger for the Divine one, with something else, like alcohol, smoking, or drugs. They are easy to access these days. It might seem like they are working in the beginning to feed our spiritual hunger. But when we put something else in the place of God for a long time, it can become an addiction. At first, it seems like it feeds and satisfies our souls, but it will consume and destroy our souls. We will lose our control, our freedom, and our souls eventually.

Ironically, when we welcome our Lord in the place where we have room for the Divine one, we are not only servants of God. When we have our Lord, we become co-workers with our Lord, and we can better enjoy our freedom more. When we obey God, God will make us free. There is a mystery of joyful obedience. It seems like we are bound to God, but we are free with God. The relationship with God makes us feel satisfied, free, and joyful. Of course, this is not an easy way, but a narrow way. That's because it means to deny ourselves, to follow Jesus, and to follow God's will, not our will. But it is the way to find our true-self, to feed our hunger for the Divine one, to be free, and to work with our Lord.

3. What We Can Do

Jesus also said, “No one can come to me unless drawn by God who sent me.” As you know, the relationship between God and us can be very personal and private. There is no one between God and us, except Jesus Christ. So, what we can do is to share God’s love, to proclaim that God loves us already even before we know God. God loves us still even when we mess up our lives. God loves us all the time. Nothing and no one can separate us from God’s steadfast love.

I would like to share one thing that I learned from the Pastoral Care class in seminary: to make room for God. This is also what I learned again after becoming a pastor of the United Methodist Church. When a church member comes to a pastor for pastoral counseling, it cannot be more than six sessions. I thought that pastors needed to provide continuous care and counseling. But what I learned is that after six sessions, if the church member needs help, pastors need to refer that church member to appropriate counseling or small groups. For example, a church member can come to the pastor, because of an Alcohol Addiction problem. As you know, it is very difficult to admit to Alcoholic Addiction, but it can be the beginning of healing. After less than six sessions of pastoral counseling, the pastor can introduce the person to an AA meeting, an Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting, maybe one in the neighboring area. So, for the pastoral care class project, I attended a couple of AA meetings. I also learned about the twelve steps program, which is very spiritual. The first step is “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.” The second step is

“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” The third step is “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.” To refer someone does not mean to toss this church member out of pastoral care, but to give this church member into the hands of God with more effective care and support. What the pastors can do is to nudge this church member, like asking “How was your AA meeting?” As you know, pastors cannot force them to go and to be healed. Pastors cannot heal and empower. Each person has the freedom to choose. And only God can heal and empower us.

4. Please Come to God's Table

This communion table is not mine, not yours, not our church's, but God's table. This table is for you. God created us. God loves us. God wants to heal and empower us. God wants to feed you with Godself. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the bread of life. Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Please come to God's table! Please receive God's grace and love. None can make a choice except yourself. God is waiting for you. Choose Jesus! There is healing. There is an abundant life. Please come to God's table!

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, we are hungry and we are thirsty. Please feed us with your love and grace. Please feed us with your bread and your life. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.