

# THE **GOSPEL** ACCORDING TO **BREAD**

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A 5-WEEK  
WORSHIP  
SERIES ON  
JOHN 6

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**BARN GEESE**  
**WORSHIP**  
creative resources



Corresponding to the readings prescribed  
by the Revised Common Lectionary  
Late Summer, Year B

# SAMPLE

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Barn Geese Worship produces high-quality, approachable, inclusive resources to support creative preaching and worship.

We are committed to LGBTQIA+ support, antiracism, and expansive language for God and God’s people.

[www.barngeeseworship.com](http://www.barngeeseworship.com)



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## Introduction

Every three years, the Revised Common Lectionary gives us John 6 for five straight weeks, and preachers everywhere suspect things might get a little...stale.

"The Gospel According to Bread" is a preaching and worship series meant to help you find something to chew on.

Here's our thinking: the temptation with the Bread of Life series is to spend five weeks analyzing how to understand bread as a metaphor for Jesus. But Jesus himself is always pointing his listeners away from an intellectual understanding and back towards a physical experience: "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you!" (John 6:53)

The emphasis on experience is reflected in the arc of John 6 itself: it starts with a story, the Feeding of the Five Thousand. Stories short-circuit the desire to intellectually explain what's happening in this discourse. They redirect us from understanding to participation. We encourage you to follow suit, and leverage stories (most centrally, the Feeding) to connect your congregation to the lived experience of life in Christ.

Somewhat paradoxically, we pray that this series frees you from the need to get your people (or yourself!) to totally get Jesus as the Bread of Life. After all, Jesus never requires that his disciples understand what he's talking about. He feeds first and raises questions later. The disciples who are left by his side at the end aren't those who have figured out what he's talking about. They're the ones who know that no matter how confusing or provoking Jesus is, there's nowhere else they can go to find the words of eternal life. We don't always understand Jesus. But we need him, like daily bread, every single day to sustain and satisfy us.

## How to use this series

Take the opportunity before beginning your preparation for these five weeks to read through all of John 6. We encourage you to then check out these considerations for the season, and pray about your community and its needs in this upcoming season. And then, at last, ask yourself: "What's my arc going to be?"

Having a plan for how you intend to move with your congregation through the next five weeks will clarify your liturgical and homiletical prep, protecting you from the suspicion that you're preaching the SAME DANG THING for five weeks in a row.

We've provided preaching commentaries for each week of the season to help nudge your planning. We noticed two possible five-weeks arcs that emerged from our collective commentaries. Perhaps you'll find different ones that work better in your context.

The first arc is thematic: Experience, grace, formation, justice, mystery.

The second is progressive, and could read as a parallel for the Christian life: encounter, justification, and then sanctification in three parts.

Throughout this seeming season-within-a-season, we pray the other resources we've provided—including liturgical pieces like a Confession and a Eucharistic Prayer, as well as an Eating Meditation appropriate to use in liturgy or a Bible study—enrich your community's triennial tromp through John 6.

## How to cite our materials

Using our materials? Here's what you need to know:

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While our material is currently FREE to use, if you'd like to support our work and help us continue planning for a financially sustainable future for Barn Geese, please contribute on our website!

## Pastoral Considerations for John 6

These are the considerations we tried to hold as we prepared materials for this series. We hope you'll let us know if there are places we failed to do it, or could have done it better. You can email us at [contact@barngeeseworship.com](mailto:contact@barngeeseworship.com).

*Antisemitism:* There's a lot of "the Jews don't get it" in John 6. It's not because of silliness or stupidity or hatred of Jesus. It's because the community that wrote the gospel of John was in the midst of major conflict with the Jewish community from

which it likely sprang. Now we preach John's same gospel after two millennia of systemic violence done to Jews in the name of Christ. We did our best to honor this history by avoiding language in our commentaries that "othered" Jews. In our congregational contexts, we have each found ways to address this issue with our people. We might include notes in the bulletin or find moments in our preaching to call out this language and contextualize it. We also ask our communities to see ourselves as the people who don't "get it" throughout the gospel of John. (Because...truth.)

*Disordered eating:* For reasons of mental or physical health, there are people in your congregation for whom a big feast of bread, a dinner church service, or a hearty Eucharist isn't a safe space. They may be sensitive to language and liturgical experiences that link eating to encountering Christ, which is particularly challenging for preachers of John 6. While editing this series, we were in conversation with people who have experienced or are experiencing disordered eating, and they indicated that a narrow focus on eating, or eating in the context of worship outside of communion, may be triggering for them. Please assume that such people are in your congregation. If you choose to use our Eating Meditation in a liturgical setting or incorporate corporate eating into your worship, make sure to announce it in advance so that they can choose how best to participate (or refrain from doing so). Hold those who struggle with disordered eating in your mind and in your prayers as you prepare your sermons and worship services. We have done our best to navigate this gracefully, but we know it isn't perfect. If you're willing to share your own wisdom around this topic with us, we would be grateful to hear from you.

*Diet culture and fatphobia:* This is somewhat related to the above. For some, bread is a "bad" food: instead of being the substance of life, it's the failure of a diet. In our liturgies and commentaries, we tried to reflect our belief that there are no "good" or "bad" foods, just like there are no perfect or imperfect bodies. However, there are bodies and brains for whom bread is complicated.

*Allergies and intolerances:* Wheat, gluten, honey, and other popular bread ingredients are delicious, but for people with food allergies or intolerances, they can be dangerous. Eggs, dairy, and honey cannot be eaten as part of a vegan diet. Before bringing your favorite loaf of bread to worship, check the ingredients to make sure that everyone in your congregation can share it.

*Sexual abuse:* As you prepare hymns for the season, please check the composer. David Haas has written a lot of people's favorite communion music. He is a serial sexual abuser who has used his music to manipulate people. Because of the harm he has done, and especially because of the way in which he's used his music to do it, we Barn Geese do not use his music in our congregations.

## Confession and Forgiveness

by the Rev. Justin Kosec

*We admit our sins*

Please pray with me.

Jesus, you spread out your arms  
to welcome the world.

And then you tell us to feed them.

**But we struggle with your command.**

**We find the seed of doubt  
growing in our hearts:**

**What is our compassion  
among so much pain?**

**What is our small kindness  
in a system of injustice?**

**What is one act of reconciliation  
in a divided society?**

**How can so little food  
feed so many hungry mouths?**

We have simply forgotten:  
when you ask us to feed the world,  
you always provide the bread.

**Even when we have tasted  
the bread you multiply;  
even when we gather your leftovers,  
we still find ourselves between  
your wondrous power  
and our sinful reality.**

*We plead for God's forgiveness*

So we ask for your forgiveness.

**When you call for our faith,  
forgive our unbelief.**

**As you prepare our heavenly dwelling,  
forgive our earthly worries.**

**When you offer us armfuls of food that satisfies,  
forgive our appetite for unhealthy fare.**

**When your gospel challenges us,  
forgive our irritable complaints.**

You are patient with us  
even when we prove  
fussy and doubtful,  
reluctant and argumentative.

**How often do we act this way  
just because we are hungry?**

*We receive God's immediate forgiveness*

People of God, Jesus knows you are hungry  
for forgiveness.

So Jesus has set our table  
with bread from heaven;  
and a feast to heal the soul.

You are forgiven.  
God leavens you  
with eternal goodness.  
Jesus gives you  
forgiveness enough to share.  
And the Holy Spirit  
fills your life with  
the flavor of transformation.

You are forgiven.  
**God, give us this bread always.**

## Prayers of the Day

*July 25:*

Bread of Life,  
you nourish our whole selves.  
You give abundantly.  
You are present among us.  
You have embodied  
the grace of God for us  
by your life, death,  
and resurrection.  
Help us to embody  
your life-giving grace  
for others,  
that all the world may be fed.

**Amen.**

## Eucharistic Prayer

by the Rev. Victoria Larson

God of all, mighty and merciful,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

We thank you and praise you  
for you have satisfied the hunger of your people in every age:  
from the beginning you drew up food from the earth  
and humankind from the soil,  
filling our nostrils full of your Breath.  
You ate the fattened calf with Abraham and Sarah,  
and answered their deep longing for a child;  
you sustained your chosen people with manna  
as you led them toward the promised land;  
you sent prophets to answer the cry for bread and for justice;  
and in the fullness of time,  
you sent your own Son, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Heaven;

Who, in the night in which he was handed over,  
took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension,  
we await his coming in glory  
to share with us the great and promised feast.

Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord,  
And stir in us a hunger for justice and thirst for compassion.  
Open wide your hand  
and satisfy our deep desire—  
feed us with the Bread that is you.  
All honor and glory to you, almighty God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

## Preaching Notes

### Week One: Feeding of the 5000

Commentary by the Rev. Emily Trubey-Weller

Text: John 6:1-21

Mention the “Bread of Life discourse” and many pastors who follow the lectionary might give a loud *groan*. These five weeks explore Jesus’ teaching around the statement “I am the Bread of Life.” It is five weeks of often circular and repetitive language. Five weeks of heady concepts. Five weeks where many pastors feel challenged to not constantly repeat themselves in their preaching and also to make such otherworldly talk somehow relevant to their listeners.

Yet all of this starts not with some lofty teaching, but with an *experience*: The Feeding of the Five Thousand.

This “sign”—and the six others in John’s gospel—follows a pattern: Jesus performs miracle and follows up by teaching on it, further illuminating it.

Jesus has good pedagogy: the lessons that stick with us are the ones grounded in experience. But Christ’s act and teaching are also more than skilled method. Some of the deepest truths can’t be merely talked about; they must be embodied.

When I was pregnant with my big baby (as he now calls himself at two and a half), I pored over books about breastfeeding. I knew it was super important. I knew that breastfeeding or chestfeeding was the single best thing you could do for your child’s physical and emotional development in their first year of life. I also knew that it was a tough and sometimes impossible task for parents. I was scared of the challenges that could arise. I wondered about what it would feel like. I was curious whether latent instincts would materialize. And I was admittedly scared about taking on such a monumental task as nourishing another living being with my own body. I wanted to learn as much as I could. So I read.

I wouldn’t say the books didn’t help. They definitely did.

But no lesson from experts, or pull-quote from a blog, or even heartfelt tale from a fellow parent held a freakin’ candle to what it was like to hold my big baby in my arms for the first time they latched. Suddenly it was no longer words on a page. It was no longer theoretical. It was boobs. And fluids. And skin-to-skin. And exhaustion and pain and fevers and sweat and awe. It was messy and beautiful and real. It was something like what I read about, but also nothing like what I read about.

I relate this story not to tote the power of breastfeeding or chestfeeding. Different parents have different experiences of feeding their babies, and those who bottle feed also know plenty about fluids, exhaustion, and beauty. For me, this powerful experience of nourishing my baby for the first time—of becoming for him an embodied experience of love as he learned to trust that food would come, comfort would be given, and warmth would be shared—this taught me that certain things simply must be experienced. There are some things you only get once they have happened to you. There are some teachings you just have to do before you can know. Some of the deepest truths can't be merely talked about; they must be embodied.

When have you had an experience like that? One that taught you something that a book just couldn't quite get at? An experience that embodied a deep truth?

When he fed the five thousand, Jesus gave deep truth a bodily experience. With coarse barley loaves and a couple of fish... with real food passed from hand to hand... with chewing and swallowing and very few words... amid skepticism and doubt and eventually awe... Jesus embodied what it means to be the Bread of Life.

How can we create an experience for our listeners as we relate this story of embodied grace?

You might create an experience for your congregation. You might help them place themselves in the experience of being one of those five thousand by engaging the whole congregation in a form of Ignatian contemplation. You might (as your COVID-19 safety precautions allow) distribute bread (or a gluten-free baked good) for the congregation to eat during the sermon or adapt our eating meditation to use in place of the sermon this week. Let them literally chew on this lesson! Allow them to be embodied grace for others, and take the usual worship hour to give time to a local feeding ministry, offering bread to others who hunger. Perhaps you could invite the congregation to sit down on the grass and enjoy a picnic as they hear this story. Draw them into the feeding of the five thousand in a real, embodied way.

The next four weeks will give us plenty of insight about what the Bread of Life *means*. Take this week to dwell in what the Bread of Life *feels like*. Create an experience for your listeners, and embody the Gospel in a new way.

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