

## **“The Longings of the Heart”**

**John 6:24-35**

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Why does fresh baked bread smell so good? Is there another aroma that says welcome better or more quickly melts the stress and strain of life? I don't think so.

In the early service in the fellowship hall, Lou served fresh bread that she baked this morning. You could smell that inviting aroma the moment you entered the building and, as you would expect, it put everybody in a wonderful mood. “Now you tell us,” I can hear you whisper as you sit in this service listening to your stomach growl.

Of course, several members asked me after that service if fresh baked bread was going to be served every Sunday. You know why they asked, I'm sure. It supports my theory of church growth, “If we cook it, they will come.”

Jesus knew that good food draws a crowd, didn't he? Prior to our text, he fed the multitudes and look what happened. The crowds followed him the next day to the other side of the Sea of Galilee until they found him. This began a conversation between them and Jesus that had its frustrating moments.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone when you felt that you were not on the same page? Sure, we all have. It appears this occurred that day in Capernaum. Jesus tried to talk to them about the longings of their hearts, but they preferred to focus upon the longings of their bodies. He wanted to address spiritual matters while they were content to keep the discussion centered on their physical needs.

I can certainly understand. If I had been in the crowd that was fed the previous day, I would have wondered what else Jesus could do and how he could make life easier.

Jesus, however, wanted to go deeper. It was not that he was unconcerned about their physical needs or even his own. He was, as he showed by taking their empty stomachs seriously the previous evening.

He was concerned about more, though. It was the longings of their hearts that he felt compelled to talk about the next day. It was time to address them.

“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of loaves. Do 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 the Father has set his seal” John 6:26-27.

What are the longings of the heart? Why are they so important? How are they satisfied? What will happen if you neglect them? How can you help others discover and satisfy the longings of their heart? Let's consider these questions in our time together this morning.

**For what does the heart long?** I believe there are many things. A pure heart longs for meaning, purpose, peace, security, guidance, direction, strength, courage, confidence, self-esteem, recognition, integrity, a sense of accomplishment, justice, mercy, forgiveness, a life well lived and even life after death. I would add one more to the list and as you can see, I have separated it from the others. I believe the heart longs for

relationships, companionship with God and others. Loneliness, or at least separation from those loved and trusted, may cause the heart to break more than anything else.

**How do we satisfy the longings of our hearts?** We know how to satisfy the needs of our bodies, but what about our hearts? Listen to the words of Jesus.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Those are bold and powerful words. They are also compassionate and inclusive. What do they mean?

For John, there definitely was a connection between faith and the longings of our hearts because there was a unique connection between God and Jesus, one that transcended the relationship between God and Moses. In Christ, John believed the human heart found everything for which it was longing. This was why he made this bold declaration the center of his entire gospel by suggesting that God marked Jesus as His very own son.

**How does Jesus satisfy the longings of our hearts?** For me, Presbyterian minister Sally Lorey answers this question in a prayer I heard her voice. “With you, dear Lord, there is no wisdom we cannot learn or burden we cannot shoulder.” Quite frankly, Jesus brings the best out in us as he accompanies us on our daily journey of faith because all that he discloses about God nourishes that special image of God in us.

**What will happen if we neglect the longings of our hearts, as it appeared some of Jesus’ listeners were doing?** I think the desires of the flesh will control us, and to their excesses, they will bring the worst out in us.

**What will happen if we turn away from Jesus and look elsewhere to satisfy the longings of our hearts?** I think our search in other places will be futile if we ignore Jesus because no one understood the nature of God or embodied that character of God like Jesus. This was, after all, his mission and he accomplished it as John well knew.

“This is the work of God,” Jesus said to his listeners, “that you believe in him whom he has sent” John 6:29.

Perhaps this was why John used such strong language in this passage and was so adamant about following Jesus. Many of his weary readers were disappointed that Jesus had not returned and were considering walking away from their commitment to him. In John’s opinion, this would be a grave mistake, a heartbreaking one.

So, John encourages his peers to remain faithful disciples and share their faith with friends and neighbors. He also encouraged them to walk in Jesus’ shoes and be the bread of life for hungry souls that were struggling. Since they knew what the heart longed for, they needed to be sensitive to those whose hearts were empty.

So do we. **Who among your family and friends has an empty heart?** What could you do to help them? Let me encourage you to share your faith. Let me also challenge you to do what Jesus did.

Show respect. Listen to their story. Walk in their shoes. Be an encourager. Instill confidence. Believe in them. Express gratitude. Give sound advice. Share your resources. Be an advocate. Forgive. Compliment achievements.

I am convinced that these acts of kindness have the sweet aroma of fresh baked bread.

Recently, author and minister, Tom Ehrich, read the obituary for Ray Shaw, an editor at Dow Jones & Company, publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*. Ehrich worked for

Shaw as a graduate student at Columbia University's School of Journalism. Shaw's passing brought back a special memory to Ehrich.

"One evening, after yet another odd day at the journalism school, I arrived at Dow Jones and found a note in my box. It said, 'Keep up the good work. Ray.'

That single note taught me more than any class at Columbia. It was like manna in the wilderness. It was like receiving a sufficiency of bread from the hands of Jesus on the hillside. His simple expression of praise and gratitude turned a job into a vocation. Without adding a dollar to my paycheck, Ray Shaw drew even more and better work from me."

**This week, go make some bread that does not perish and feed people what they really need.**