Suggested Reading

A Recommended Reading

John 7:1 – 8:59

B Read Carefully

John 7:1-24	The Feast of Tabernacles
John 7:25-30	The origin of the Messiah
John 8:12-30	The Discourse on Jesus' origin
John 8:31-59	The Discourse on the relationship between the Jews and Abraham
John 5:18-47	The relationship between the Father and the Son

C Background Reading

John: 8:12, 58 Exodus 3: 1-14

Prayer

O God, who through the blessed apostle John
have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word,
grant, we pray,
that we might grasp with proper understanding
what he so marvellously brought to our ears,
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Feast of St. John)

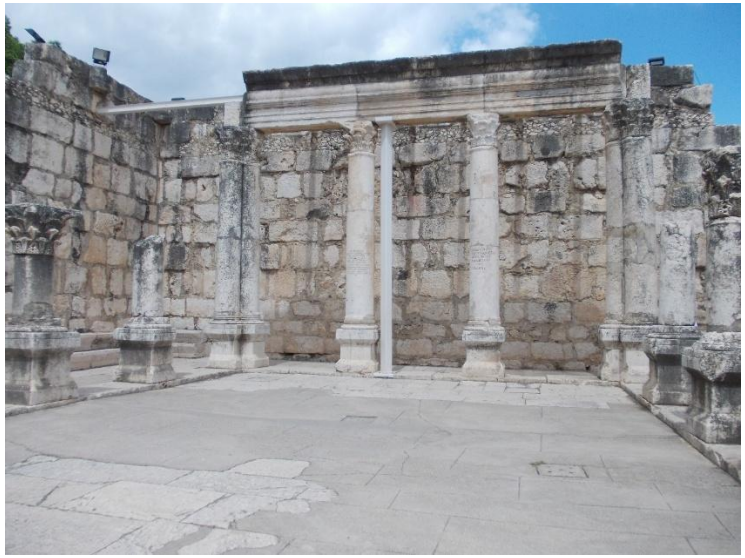
PFP v2/2026

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames

The Bread of Life Discourse 5

John 6: 1 – 71.



The Synagogue at Capernaum.

Chapter 6 begins with two signs – the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Walking on the Water. This is followed by the Bread of Life Discourse, which draws out the meaning of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

The Bread of Life discourse is in two parts:

The Sapiential Section = the first part is called sapiential (Latin = Wisdom). This section contrasts the Exodus experience of the people of Israel with the action of God – in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the life of the reader. Jesus is the bread of Life, the heavenly bread that has come down from heaven. Our study the Old Testament background offers us a deeper understanding of this section.

The Eucharistic Section = focuses on the mystery of the Eucharist. It should be noted that there is no account of the institution of the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel. Rather, the eucharistic references are found within chap 6.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

- and *the Walking of Water* are found in each of the Gospels.
- However, the Gospel of John offers the reader a deeper insight into this sign.

As we have seen previously, Chapter Six begins with geographical and time markers: *'Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee – or of Tiberias … the Passover, the festival of the Jews was near* (v 1-2). The reference to the Passover is significant as this section of the Gospel focuses on the replacement of the Jewish festivals and draws on references to the Exodus journey: Manna & Moses.

In distinctively Johannine fashion, it is Jesus who takes the initiative. He sees the crowds, he decides to act, rather than responding to a situation as in the Synoptic accounts. Philip and Andrew are focused on the material level, the cost (200 denarii) and the five barley loaves and two fish. Only John mentions the barley loaves (barley ripens earlier than wheat as the Passover is a spring festival) but the deeper meaning is that this is a reference to Elisha's feeding of one hundred men with barley loaves (2 Kings 4,42-44).

'Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were sitting there' (6:11). These are eucharistic actions with eucharistic language (*eucharistēsas - to give thanks)*. Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them. Eucharistic language also colours Jesus' command to gather (*synēgagon*) the fragments (*ta klasmata*) left over, so that nothing may be lost. The *Didache* (9,4), *1 Clement* (34,7) and Ignatius (*Letter to Polycarp*, 4,2) use the verb *synagein* to speak of the gathering of the faithful for the eucharist, and *ta klasmata* is the term used for the eucharistic fragments *(Didache 9,3,4).*

Next Week

The Feast of Tabernacles

The theme of the replacement of the Jewish feast continues in the following chapters (7:1 – 10:21) with the Festival of Tabernacles: a festival of water and light.

Throughout Chapters seven and eight, the question of Jesus' identity is disputed. Where is he from? Galilee? = if so, he cannot be the messiah, can he? Or is he the sent one from God? Some initially believe this may be so but reject us a notion. This discussion includes the relationship between Jesus and the Father, which we have seen in the Prologue, and also arises in Chapter Five.

Jesus proclaims: *'I am the light of the World'* (8:12) and more significantly *'before Abraham ever was, I am'* (8:58). We shall examine the I am sayings, a feature of the Gospel of John.

In the midst of these disputes the relationship with the Jewish authorities is becoming more polemical, as they set out to arrest Jesus, and then decide to kill him. The background to this section has the sense of a trial = words such as 'witness, testimony, judgement' are words that would be found in a court of law.

How many of the I am sayings can you name?

How many 'legal expressions' can you find in this section?

THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE IN SIX WORDS = 6,31-32

1	2	3	4	5	6
Claim					
He	gave	them	bread	from heaven	to eat
Challenge					
It was not					
Moses who	gave	you	the bread from heaven		
But it is my					
Father who	*gives*	you	the *true* bread from heaven		to eat

- **Bread** = Manna; Bread of heaven; Bread of life.
- **Them** = The ancestors; you = the audience; you = Jesus' believers
- **He** = Moses; My Father
- **From Heaven** = Jesus the sent one – from heaven or from Nazareth?
- **Gave** = Not gave, but gives
- **To Eat** = To eat = to believe; To eat = to consume food

The Bread of Life Discourse.

The repetitive use of the "Amen, amen" markers offer a useful outline of the narrative, particularly as repetition is a noted feature of the evangelist and a feature of the thought processes of the period. Furthermore, the importance of these verses cannot be underestimated, *because they act as a summary of each section of the discourse and the springboard for a further exploration of this mystery at greater depth*.

THE AMEN, AMEN SAYINGS IN THE DISCOURSE

6,26 AMEN, AMEN, I SAY TO YOU, YOU SEEK ME NOT BECAUSE YOU SAW THE SIGNS, BUT BECAUSE YOU ATE THE LOAVES AND WERE FILLED

6,32 AMEN, AMEN, I SAY TO 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.

6,47 AMEN, AMEN, I TELL YOU, WHOEVER BELIEVES HAS ETERNAL LIFE.

6,53 AMEN, AMEN, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, YOU HAVE NO LIFE IN YOU.

6:26: Jesus is aware that this sign produces nothing but filled bellies. However the reference to the loaves establishes the link between the Sign and the Discourse, which explains its meaning.

6:32: is the most significant verse in the Sapiential/Wisdom section of the discourse and possibly the whole discourse, because it draws together the Exodus experience of the past, with the work of the Father today. *'it is my Father who **gives** you the true bread from heaven'.* This use of the present tense transforms the understanding of this exodus event, as its meaning is fulfilled in the life and action of Jesus.

6:47: Central to this expression of the Father's will is the faith of the disciple. From the outset, and at the conclusion of the Gospel, faith and believe is the authentic response of the disciple.

6:53: To eat and to drink means receiving Jesus' life. The language used throughout this section:

– bread, flesh, blood, drink, to eat, to drink, true food, true drink, will give, for your sakes - have rich eucharistic connotations.

We see how the argument which began in vs 32 matures: the idea of the true bread from heaven in vs 32: it is my Father who gives you the **true** bread from heaven".
The *true bread* that the Father *gives* – is my flesh, which is *true* food and my blood is *true* drink. The true bread from heaven is the eucharistic food and drink of Jesus.

The disciple is drawn into communion with the life of the Father and with the Son through faith (6,29;35;40;47) and through the Eucharist (6,53-54). Those who eat the eucharistic flesh are taken up into the life which comes from God.

The contrast between Moses and Jesus is central to this discourse. Moses and their ancestors who ate the manna are dead; but those who will eat the bread that has come down from heaven will live forever. Although the manna came down from heaven, it was nonetheless, earthly food which ceased once the Israelites entered the Promised Land. The food that Jesus offers is the true heavenly bread, for it is identified with him who has come down from heaven. Once more the author makes the distinction between thinking of the bread in heavenly, rather than material terms.

"I AM the living bread that came down from heaven. (6:50)
Jesus, using once more the I AM saying – is the living bread that came down from heaven. He is the fulfilment and replacement of the manna, the Exodus account and the Passover celebration. It is in this sense that the eucharistic words of Jesus are found here at vs 51, rather than at the Last Supper.

I am the Bread of Life

6, 35 'Jesus said to them, "I AM the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry
And he who believes in me, Will never be thirsty".

Jesus, the bread of life, is

- given by my Father
- the true bread from heaven
- the bread of God
- the bread of God which comes down from heaven
- the bread of God which gives life to the world

Whereas the declaration made by the crowd, 'he gave us bread from heaven to eat' was limited: by time = the exodus; and by faith and ethnicity = the law given to the Jewish people. This promise is for all time = he gives – present tense, and all peoples = the life of the world – for all.

However, we are thinking of nourishment as a sapiential concept.

> *"For in the readings, as explained by the homily, God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering spiritual nourishment".* Roman Missal

This understanding has its roots in the Jewish understanding of the *Torah*, the word of God as nourishment.

> *"the Law has become a person. When we encounter Jesus, we feed on the living God himself, so to speak; we truly eat "bread from heaven". Pope Benedict XVI.*

(We will return to look at other features of the I am sayings next time).