Hi,

Today’s update:

* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Today, we turn to Jesus, as we begin daily reflections on each of his seven “I am” statements in the gospel of John. First up: “I am the bread of life.”

***Exodus 16:1-5 (NRSV)***

**The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”**

**Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.”**

***John 6:35-40 (NRSV)***

**Jesus 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. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”**

I just don’t eat as well as I should; not enough fruits and vegetables, too much processed food, and so on. I know this and if I forget there are daily reminders everywhere I turn. Countless magazine covers and news stories tell me how I could do a better job of nourishing my body. You’d think that at my age, I’d realize that my body needs all the help it can get.

More than 3,000 years, the Hebrew slaves who escaped from Pharaoh faced a more pressing problem of nourishment: starvation. The problem was that there just hadn’t been much time to pack. When Moses said go, everyone had simply dashed for the Red Sea. They somehow found the time to plunder the Egyptians, grabbing jewelry and clothing, but they had not prepared any food provisions other than some loaves of unleavened bread. When the Hebrew slaves reached the safety of the Sinai wilderness, they realized that choosing gold over food had perhaps not been the best decision and they began to complain, “you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:3). But of course, they were completely wrong. They were God’s people and God would provide for them. Soon, God began raining “manna” upon them, the “bread from heaven,” a flakey, nutritious substance that could be gathered off the ground each morning. When the sun grew hot this bread from heaven melted, but there was no need to store any food. God provided them with fresh manna every day. A powerful reminder that God provides every day.

More than a millennium later, descendants of these Hebrew slaves gathered along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee anxious to see the miracle-working teacher named Jesus. It was a crowd of thousands and Jesus asked one of his disciples, Philip, where they could buy bread for everyone to eat. They would surely need nourishment as the day wore on. [It will help to have your Bible open to John 6 as you read the rest of this study.]

Philip told Jesus that feeding the crowd would take far more money than any of them had. But a boy came forward with a few loaves and a few fish. Jesus told everyone to sit, gave thanks for the food, and then gave it to be distributed to everyone – and a few loaves became enough to feed thousands.

Jesus, realizing that the crowd would demand more from him, went up a nearby mountain and later that night, made his way back across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum – by foot!

The next day, the crowd finds Jesus again and he tells them that they only followed him because of the previous day’s miracle. And then, he tries to take them to a whole new place. Jesus tells them that he can do better than some loaves of bread that will grow stale and old anyway, he can offer them “the food that endures for eternal life,” namely himself, “for it is on [Jesus] that God the Father has set his seal” (John 6:27).

Now, I’m sure that the folks on the seashore that day were confused and mystified at this, but like the Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4), they want what they think Jesus is selling. She wanted “living water” so that she wouldn’t have to make the trek to Jacob’s well anymore, and the crowd is surely hoping for a lifetime bread supply. All they want to know is what work they have to do to get such bread. Jesus replies that they must simply “believe in him whom he [God the Father] has sent” (6:29).

Naturally, they expect something akin to what God provided to their ancestors, bread falling from heaven. But that isn’t what Jesus is talking about at all, for the manna, though God-sent, was *not* the “true bread of heaven . . . that gives life to the world.”

*“I am the bread of life”*

The crowds are still waiting to get their bellies filled when Jesus declares to them, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus himself is the nourishment needed for eternal life. This is the first of seven profound moments in John’s Gospel when Jesus declares “I am the . . . .” Why seven? Because it is the number which signified wholeness and completeness; God created the cosmos in seven days. Why is the “I am” significant? Because it is the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush (see Exodus 3).

This simple “I am” statement had to rock the crowd back on its heels. Jesus, this man from Nazareth, is the bread from heaven, he says, sent by God the Father, so that who believes in him may have eternal life. Jesus is the nourishment, the bread, that sustains eternal life, which neither hunger nor thirst can touch. Further, it is Jesus who will raise the dead on the last day!

Let’s be clear here: Jesus is claiming to be much more than the miraculous manna of the Exodus. The path to eternal life lies though him. He will do what only God can do – resurrect the dead. To some, even many, who listened this must have seemed blasphemous. Little wonder that Jesus’ claims drew quick opposition (v. 41-42).

But Jesus is not through. He is the bread of life, the nourishment needed for eternal life. “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (v. 51). And so Jesus brings the crowd to the cross and to the deep mystery of his body and his blood. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day . . . those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me , and I in them.”

One can’t miss the sacramental language here, speaking to the deep mystery of what we call Holy Communion. These words help us to understand why most Christians have seen Holy Communion as more than a mere remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice. Instead, we embrace that in the bread and the cup, Christ is present. It is the bread of heaven, Jesus the Christ, who nourishes us for eternal life, who will sustain our resurrected bodies. The only question for us is this: Will we trust Jesus?

*A bit more:* *“Belief” and “Faith”*

Translations, even of the Bible, can be tricky. At several points in Jesus’ ch. 6 discourse, English translations use verb forms of the word “belief” to translate the Greek root, *pistis*. Jesus says, for example, “all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life” (v.40) and “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life” (v. 47). The Greek root here, *pistis*, means “faith,” but because English has lost the verb form of “faith,” we substitute “believe.” And this creates a problem.

For many English-speakers, the word “believe” speaks mainly of the intellect; it is a “head” word. Thus, it becomes easy to see “doubt” as the opposite of “belief” and make the whole thing about whether we agree with the basic doctrine/beliefs about Jesus, as we do when we affirm our beliefs when reciting the Apostle’s Creed.

But this isn’t what the NT writers are getting at most of the time when they use *pistis* in a variety of grammatical forms. *Pistis*/faith is a “heart” word; “trust” is an excellent synonym. If I have faith in someone, it means I trust them. If we have faith in Jesus, we trust him in all things and with every part of our being – or at least we do the best job of trusting him as we can.

If we still had a verb form of “faith,” the two statements above would read thusly: “all who see the Son and faith in him [put their trust in him] may have eternal life” and “Very truly I tell you, whoever faiths [trusts] has eternal life.”

Do I trust Jesus? Do I trust that what he says is true? Do I trust that he loves me and gave his life for me? Will I entrust to him all the messiness and mistakes of my life? These are the sorts of questions to ask ourselves.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott