

October 19, 2025

John 6:35-40, 51-57
2 Corinthians 6:1-10

“Fueled by Christ”
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Six years ago, I began distance running. After spending a couple years working on the 5k distance, I decided to stretch myself to complete a half marathon. I finished my first half at the Mill Race Marathon in 2019, but I experienced more than a few challenges along the way.

As I ramped up distance, I needed to learn about fueling. Distance runners don't talk about eating food during a race—we talk about consuming fuel. The fuel we pick is important. We spend our training cycle trying out different types of fuel, because oftentimes when your body is under the stress of distance running, your gastrointestinal system will protest in ways that aren't helpful for racing! As we sample different types of fuel, the most scientific of runners will also count the grams of carbohydrates per hour of effort. There's specific formulas out there for body size and time of effort that claim to ensure you won't bonk during your race. For all you non-runners out there, bonking is extreme fatigue caused by a lack of available carbs in your system. Bonking is horrible. And it happened to me in my first half marathon.

In that race, I did a lot of things wrong. I trained appropriately, but I made choices on race day that caused me to be dehydrated and under-fueled. I ended up barely finishing the last mile of the race, with continuous thoughts that the curbs on Washington Street looked pretty good for sitting! Interestingly enough, that race remains my personal best time, despite having finished 6 more half marathons after seeking more coaching and race day wisdom.

Even if you aren't a distance runner, you probably know that what you consume affects how you feel and perform. If you have a disease like diabetes or celiac's, the types of food you consume can mean life or death. For the rest of us, when we eat lots of processed junk food, we feel sluggish, but a bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables leaves us energized. How we fuel ourselves matters.

Fueling begins with our bodies. It's not something that we can intellectualize or spiritualize. We can count carb grams all I want, but if we don't eat them when it counts, all that math is just an intellectual exercise. We must put actual food in our physical mouths. In our Gospel passage today, when Jesus is speaking of himself as the bread of life, he isn't spiritualizing himself—he is speaking about bread as a daily necessity that the people listening had just received from him in abundance.

The audience for Jesus' sermon was several people who were present with him and the disciples at a miracle. They were present for the feeding over 5000 people from five loaves

and two fish donated by a generous child. Some of the crowd went so far as to follow Jesus across the sea of Galilee, possibly in search of more free food or maybe a deeper understanding of what Jesus was all about.

After they arrived, the people were treated to a speech that confuses readers to this day. Like the conversation with the woman at the well about living water, Jesus uses a life essential—bread—to remind his hearers that connection to Jesus is vital for a flourishing existence. In Jesus' argument, he refers to other bread that was provided by God—manna. This was miraculous bread that appeared daily to the people of Israel after they fled Egyptian slavery and were wandering in the desert. However, the bread of life Jesus discusses here doesn't rot like the manna once did. It is bread that feeds all who come to Jesus for eternity.

If we are going to experience God, it must be in our bodies, not just our minds or spirits. Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, came to earth to inhabit a body like ours. As the Message translation of John 1:14 says, "The Word (Jesus) became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." There is something powerful and raw when experience God that way. Our bodies know deeply that Jesus understands us, in ways that our minds often can't process. That's why treating faith solely as an intellectual or spiritual exercise misses the chance for something truly transformative to happen in our lives.

In today's text, Jesus goes so far as to command us to eat his flesh and drink his blood—a statement that is as horrifying to us as his observant Jewish listeners. He spoke shockingly to make a point that we must abide and comingle ourselves with Jesus to find what we're looking for in life. We must dwell deeply with him to be truly fed. Jesus himself is the fuel we all need to flourish.

This idea is messy for us Presbyterians. The occasion when we focus on Jesus' body and blood together is at our monthly trip to the communion table. This is not a bad thing. It's in our tradition to see this communal meal as a commemoration of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. But what if we thought of it as more? Maybe it serves as a time to remind ourselves of Christ's physical experiences on earth. Or as an opportunity for deep reflection on of the importance of spiritual food as well as physical food. Or as a chance to contemplate all the good and beautiful things we've witnessed in the last month. There are more options at the table than we might otherwise realize. It's an opportunity to be fueled by Jesus to continue his work in the world.

On World Communion Sunday, we lamented together about the brokenness and violence of our world. That communal labor was healthy but can be drowned by bad news. With smartphones in our hands, in a blink of an eye we can spend hours dwelling on every fire that rages around us, but locally and globally. That kind of doomscrolling doesn't help, but we can use it to fool ourselves into thinking we are learning more about what's happening. According to research reported by Harvard Medical School, doomscrolling can have both negative physical and psychological effects. Physical effects can include nausea,

headaches, muscle tension, neck and shoulder pain, low appetite, difficulty sleeping, and elevated blood pressure. Psychologically, doomscrolling is linked to worse mental well-being and life satisfaction, evoking greater levels of existential anxiety — a feeling of dread or panic that arises when we confront the limitations of our existence. Doomscrolling is poor fuel for a living an abundant life.

In today's Epistle, we heard from the Apostle Paul and his exhortation to the estranged church at Corinth. Like Paul, we may have already experienced or have future experience with affliction, hardships, calamities, beatings, riots, sleepless nights, and hunger. We see them all over the news. These are difficult things. But when we fixate on hardship and suffering, we risk forfeiting the deeper, life-giving possibilities that Christ offers.

In another letter of Paul, this time to the church in Philippi, he closes the epistle by encouraging the church not to spend time worrying, but instead of worrying, praying. In addition, he exhorts them with this in Philippians 4:8: "Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse" (MSG).

To endure the challenges of our world, we must be deeply fueled by Christ. I'm not saying we need to spend hours in Bible study and put our heads in the sand about the tumult around us. Rather, we ought to balance being informed about our world with at least an equal measure of goodness. Let's dig deeper into Jesus' experiences of standing with those on the margins and model our lives after his. Let's spend time in community encouraging each other. Let's immerse ourselves in the beauty of God's creation and all forms of art. Let's notice and highlight all that is good and beautiful about the world. (Remember Ross Gay's encouragement to label our "delights!") Let's get around tables with one another, with all our differences and imperfections, and laugh with abandon. That's how we'll endure all the challenges that are in store for us as people who care about justice for everyone.

Friends, keep fueling yourselves on Jesus and you'll never bonk. Drink of the living water and you'll never get dehydrated. Reflect on Jesus' posture toward those on the margins and seek to live likewise. Amid violence and injustice, remain surrounded by community and act together on behalf of others. Seek beauty wherever you can find it. Celebrate the good in the world in all its forms. Cultivate hope everywhere you go. And practice joy because we are fueled by the One who gives life to us all.

Amen.