

Do you want to live forever?

On June 10, 1918, during the Battle of Belleau Wood in France, 44-year-old Marine Corps First Sergeant Daniel Daly, armed with a pistol and hand grenades, single-handedly attacked and destroyed an enemy machine gun emplacement.

It was the kind of action from which legends are born, but it was not even Daly's most famous action that month that he is known for. He is better known for his battle leadership four days earlier when he urged his 73rd Machine Gun Company forward with words now legendary in the Marine Corps: *"Do you want to live forever?"* They went *"over the top"* and charged the German positions. Those words have become a rallying cry for the marines – they will do whatever it takes to defend the United States, even if it requires them to die.

Whether the statement is said in the context of war or not, it is an interesting question that human beings have been asking themselves since the Garden of Eden. Do you want to live forever? Yes. Most human beings don't want to die. Look at our actions. We think that if we have the right health plan, follow the right diet, receive the right treatments, we can put off this getting old thing. Why? Human beings are wired to want to live forever. We are not anxious to die. Would you like to die today? I don't.

Part of the reason for that is that God didn't create human beings to die. Death only entered the world after the fall into sin. Death was not to be part of the cycle of living. It isn't natural. Near the beginning of this world, our first parents chose evil over good. They chose self over service. They chose Satan over God. They ate the forbidden fruit, and death entered the world. Pandora's Box was open, and death could not be put back into that box. The human race gave up on God, but God did not give up on them.

What if someone could stop death? What if death could be stuffed back into the box? What if someone could change death? That was what Jesus was trying to teach the people in our text. **"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life."** What is Jesus promising here? If Jesus is just promising us that we can live forever on earth, is it really a good promise at all? In the words that are found just before our text, Jesus has just fed the 5,000. He had provided so much for the people that they had basketfuls of left-overs. They saw the miracle that Jesus had done. John tells us: **"After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."** Jesus did not come just to give us physical life forever here in this world. But he came to give us a quality of life that would be better than any life in this world. He came to give life that would not be tainted by sin. Yet, when Jesus makes it clear that he was not the next Moses, who would be the next political Savior, they begin to grumble and complain. This wasn't the Savior that they were looking for.

They caught what Jesus was saying here in our text. They looked at Jesus and said: **"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"** *We've known you since you were a little boy playing games around their homes. We've seen you work in the carpenter's shop. We've seen you your whole life. Jesus – you didn't come from heaven.* Their human reason could not wrap their minds around the thought that Jesus had come from heaven to give them life. They were looking for a different kind of Savior.

How about us? Do we find ourselves looking for a different kind of God? Do we ever find ourselves grumbling and complaining to God because he isn't doing things the way we want him to do? *God – why did you let my husband die so suddenly? God – why don't you fix the things that are going wrong in my body? God – why don't you give me more money in my life? I would be so much happier.* If we are honest with ourselves, we all would have to admit that there are days when Jesus' words don't make sense to us either. There are days that we doubt his words.

Last week, we spent a couple of days in New York City. One of the things that we did was go through the 911 museum. If you have ever been there, then you know what it feels like. The displays are powerful. Everything in the museum put a human side on the events of that day. There were some of the displays that I needed to just walk away from. As you

read the messages that a husband left on voicemail for his wife just before he died, I had to walk away before the tears would be pouring from my eyes. I cannot imagine what it was like for the thousands of people who died that day. This was so wrong. This is just so sad. These men were someone's husband. These women were someone's wife. Someone's child. The people who died that day, had gone to work or on a plane like they had done many times before. On that day, everything changed. It has to be incredibly difficult for the families of those victims. I'm not sure how I would have felt about God, at least for a moment of time, if my wife had died that way on that day. You can't help but be reminded just how short life can be.

Jesus says to us this morning that he came to give us life that is much bigger than anything in this world. These words of Jesus are powerful. **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever."** Jesus is saying that real life comes from me. Every day he keeps drawing us to himself. Every day we sin. Every day we doubt his promises. Every day he keeps pulling us back to himself.

Who of us haven't felt like Elijah in our first reading this morning? Who of us haven't been depressed because our picture of life isn't the picture that God is painting for us? Who of us haven't had feelings of bitterness, rage and anger like Paul describes in our second lesson? Then we can take comfort in Jesus' words. God's greatest delight is to patiently draw us back to his Son so that over and over again we taste and see what Jesus has done for us and is doing for us.

Do you want to live forever? Yes. Why? Jesus has taken all of your sins and nailed them to a cross. Your sin is forgiven. Jesus has put death back in the box. He has filled you with Life. That Life changes everything. It changes how we think, it changes how we act. It changes how we feel about each other. Trust in Jesus – the Bread of Life. Amen.