

## John the Ad Man

January 31, 2011

Senior Sermon (*John 6:35, 41-51*)

Virginia Theological Seminary (5-7 minutes)

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” WOW! Now that’s a bold statement. I mean, that’s the kind of catch phrase a marketing team could only hope to come up with after hours of brainstorming.

I guess I have marketing on the brain, because, lately, I’ve been sort of mesmerized by the strategy the Mormon church current has going. Have you seen these billboards? They feature photos of extraordinarily beautiful people; below the pretty person on the left, there’s the tagline: “I’m a Mormon”; in the center, there’s a couple of others folks, along with the Mormon website; and then another amazing looking person, over on the right, also declaring: “I’m a Mormon.”

In Seattle, these billboards are all over the place...on the sides of buses, up on buildings...and I have to agree with the comment made by a news reporter recently, who said, “this is one, savvy advertising campaign!” I think that’s what we find in the Book of John...a very savvy advertising campaign. While the synoptic gospels concentrate more on the lineage, history, and ministry of Jesus, John goes right to these larger-than life images.

John’s Jesus is a confident man, beckoning to us in a reassuring manner, and the text below rotates from “I am living water, ” to “I’m the light of the world” ...“I’m the good shepherd” ...“I’m the gate ” ... “I’m the true vine...” ... “I am the bread of life,” You see what I mean? The book of John is like a whole *portfolio* of billboard ads!

Today’s passage, and the one right before it, which was read yesterday, arise out of the bickering taking place among the Jewish community, of which Jesus and his disciples are a part. They’re all standing around grumbling, “Come on...we know his family...how can *he* possibly be the ‘bread of life’?”

Jesus basically responds, “don’t worry about it...this is not about me—the son of Joseph—it’s about *your* relationship with the ‘*real*’ Father.” These interchanges follow the accusation, voiced in chapter five, that Jesus has been equating himself to God, to which he had replied, “the Son can do *nothing* on his own, but *only* what he sees the Father doing” (5:18).

And this is an important point of clarification—that our experience of God happens *through* Jesus—because it’s not some “*exclusive*” offering, as in “only *some* people can have this relationship with God.” Instead, the “exclusiveness” of Jesus’ promise is that as we relate to him, we are in relationship with God. We are not asked to believe in just Jesus, rather to believe in God “through” Jesus.

So like a billboard, Jesus invites us to God, subtly hinting that when we accept this thing—this bread—we’ll get much more than just bread. That’s how it works with savvy advertising, *right?* We see a photo of a group of people standing around, laughing at a barbeque, and we instantly realize that we could be surrounded by *fabulous* friends *constantly*, if we would simply go buy some Coors Light!

The commonality shared by billboards and John’s Jesus is a sense of seduction. If we are open to the tantalizing aroma of bread, we will be wooed in the same way Jesus woos the woman at the well. His captivating message proclaims, “I know who you are—God knows who you are...Come on...I know you want that kind of intimacy in *your* life.”

So it is not a “thing” Jesus offers, rather he offers a *relationship* with God. That’s what Jesus means when he says, “no one can come to me unless *drawn* by the Father.” He’s reminding us that this savvy advertising campaign belongs to God. God does the wooing.

We only have to look up at other billboards around us to see how hungry we are as a society, because the advertisers, of course, play into our hunger, so we are tempted by the promise of the sleekest and fastest car; the latest technology; exotic travel...we are insatiable. And although not *all* of us are caught up in these materialistic desires—*we* are seminarians, after all—we do each have our own insatiable hungers...for that perfect field ed. site, for the ideal thesis topic, for the right first call...as if any of us could know where, or how, God is best served.

And, yet, Jesus tells us what will really feed us is plain and simple bread. Unlike any other savvy marketing campaign, this is no empty promise. We look up at the billboard of this charismatic man holding a loaf of bread, inviting us into the open arms of God, and we realize, it's true—through him, we will never be hungry again.

At the communion table, and in this passage, we are reminded by these basic elements of life—in the bread and the wine—that God became incarnate—became a part of all that is fleshy and earthy—so that **we** might be in **relationship** with God. Come, let us be fed by the bread of life.

-Amen