A devout cowboy lost his favorite Bible while he was mending fences out on the range.

Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him carrying the Bible in his mouth.

The cowboy couldn’t believe his eyes.

He took the precious book out of the sheep’s mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, “It’s a miracle!”

“Not really,” said the sheep. “Your name is written inside the cover.”

It’s not a miracle that the Bible was returned. Anyone could’ve done it since the cowboy’s name was on the cover. The miracle is the talking sheep, which no one expects and the cowboy doesn’t recognize. It is similar with the miracles in John. The point isn’t the miracle. It’s the nature of the one who performs the miracles.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Just like some of us may have been distracted from the true miracle of the talking sheep by our focus on the return of the cowboy’s lost Bible, the crowds and the disciples were distracted from the true miracle by focusing too much on the physical needs met by the bread provided in the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus, not a physical concoction of flour, margarine and possibly yeast, is the true Bread of Life. Jesus, not groceries or cars or homes or boats or any other material good, is the true Bread of Life that satisfies our hunger and thirst continually and eternally.

Through the sweat of our brow, we earn money to buy groceries and cars and homes and boats and whatever else meets our physical needs or makes us happy. But we can’t and don’t earn the Bread of Life. Jesus gives that to us free, through grace and through our continual fellowship with him – fellowship through personal prayer, Bible study, welcoming and loving others and through Table Fellowship at the Eucharist. His request of us is that we believe in Him as the Bread of Life and make ourselves vessels in which to receive it.

Jesus encourages the disciples and the crowd not to be so distracted by striving to put groceries in their fridge or acquiring possessions that they fail to realize that the most important thing is to seek after Him. We all know that groceries don’t last very long, especially in families with teen-age boys. Pretty soon we’re right back at the store or the fruit stand to buy more or into the garden to harvest more. We also know that the thrill of possessions doesn’t last long as well. We buy a car we dearly love until the new car smell has faded or we buy a boat that makes us ecstatic until we see our neighbor’s boat which is better than ours. Love of possessions often just creates in us an appetite for more and better possessions so that we end up very much like the hamster in the exercise wheel. We keep going around and around to earn more money to buy a better whatever then we think we “need” an even better whatever so we have to earn more money.

When we recognize Jesus as the Bread of Life, we put our relationship to Jesus in first place in our hearts. That means we prioritize being in worship, in coming to the Table to receive this Bread of Life into ourselves, to receive grace to become more like this Bread of Life. That means we prioritize spending time developing our relationship with Jesus through prayer and meditation, through more in-depth study through a Bible stud or a course such as EFM. That means we prioritize opening our hearts to whatever the Spirit leads us to do, even if we don’t really want to do that.

When we recognize Jesus as the Bread of Life, we also prioritize our relationship to others, seeing Christ in all persons. That means we work to help everyone succeed rather than criticizing them or gossiping about them. It means we forgive them for the wrongs they’ve done to us. It means we are slow to anger, giving grace to them just as Jesus gives grace to us. It means we share of all our gifts, monetary and spiritual to make the world a better place and to make our church community reflect more of Christ. We do this even if we aren’t necessarily happy with everything that happens in the world or that happens in our church community.

Timothy Keller, a Presbyterian minister and author based in New York city, said this about the difference between too much focus on work to buy the “bread of possessions” vs willingness to receive the Bread of Life.

When you make your work your identity … if you're successful it destroys you because it goes to your head. If you're not successful it destroys you because it goes to your heart—it destroys your self-worth. [Faith in Christ] gives you an identity that's not in work or accomplishment, and that gives you insulation against the weather changes. If you're successful, you stay humble. If you're not successful, you have some ballast …. Work is a great thing when it is a servant instead of a lord.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Our Lord is Jesus, the Bread of Life that lasts forever.

Our task is to eat of this bread through staying close to the one who supplies it and through serving all people in His Name.

1. Ian Markham and Samantha R.E. Gottlich, Lectionary Levity: The Use of Humor in Preaching, Church Publishing (NY, 2017), pg 153 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Joseph Sunde, "Timothy Keller on Work as Service vs. Idolatry," Acton Institute blog (12-12-12), found on preachingtoday.com Website [↑](#endnote-ref-2)