

Better, not more

By [Audrey West](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes West's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

The lectionary has focused our attention on bread for a very long time. One might think that five barley loaves transformed into a feast plus baskets full of leftovers would be news enough, but Jesus goes on to talk about the bread for another 36 verses. He would be a dream interview for today's 24-hour news shows, with their incessant need for commentary on the latest attention-grabbing headline.

In this last Sunday of the bread discourse (let the preachers say Amen!), it may be helpful to remind ourselves how the feeding of the 5,000 fits into the wider context of John's Gospel. The first thing Jesus says in this Gospel is "What are you seeking?" What are you looking for? It is a question worth considering, and the preacher may choose to name the sorts of answers that ring truest in the congregation's particular context.

The answer suggested (even pursued) by the dominant voices of our world is more. We are pressed to seek more, to want more, to convince ourselves that we need more. Never mind the evidence that our consumer mentality is destroying the earth, destroying other people, even destroying ourselves. The quest for consumption sucks the life right out of us.

This week's Gospel text is all about consumption, but of a different kind. This is consumption that gives life, rather than taking it away. It promises real life, life "into the age" (the literal meaning of "live forever," and related to "eternal life"). This kind of life (Greek = *zoē*) is not fulfilled by earthly measures of "more," such as a longer length of time, but rather by its quality of existence. *Zoē* and its cognates appear nine times in this week's gospel lesson, suggesting that whatever we and the

disciples are seeking, the answer found in the bread that came down from heaven is worth far more than we can imagine.

What does this look like where you and your community sit?