

Sermon August 11, 2024

Children's Moment

Michael Pollen writes in his book *Cooked* that bread was really an accident discovered about 6000 years ago in Egypt when someone noticed that an old, inert bowl of porridge, that had been set aside, was no longer inert. As if a spark of life had been breathed into it. And when that newly invigorated bowl of porridge - call it dough - was heated in an oven, it grew even larger, springing up as it trapped the expanding bubbles in an airy, yet stable, structure. Something we now call Bread.

John 6:35, 41-51

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Fed By the Bread

"I am the bread of life," Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Follow me, he says, and see what you can become.

Bread is a foundational food. It nourishes our bodies and makes us strong. God provided bread...manna... for the people in the wilderness and Jesus provided bread for the people on a mountainside.

Bread. With a little flour, water and yeast, everything changes. It bubbles. It rises. It changes. It is infused with new life. With heat, we are given food that fills and nourishes us.

Over time, We learned how to turn grasses into food. We learned how to cultivate grains and manage fields, how to harvest and mill and leaven and bake. We created agriculture. We developed entire communities - entire civilizations - devoted to the making of bread.

In Arabic, the words *bread* and *life* are the same word. And in cultures where the words are different, *bread* is so basic, that the word is often used for food in general, and what was the 20th century nickname for money? *Bread*. +breadmaker =person who earns money.

And Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."

Just the day before he said these words, Jesus and the disciples had fed thousands with only five loaves of bread. The disciples had handed Jesus those few loaves, and after they quieted the crowd, "Jesus took the loaves, and gave thanks."

The bread is broken and shared, and as the story goes, all were fed and satisfied. The disciples gather up the leftovers, and there were twelve whole baskets of remains from the original five loaves.

Jesus' words, "I am the bread of life," fit into a larger story - Jesus has set a table on the hillside, where there was little bread, abundant bread appeared. There were blessings and thanks, and all were fed. This is Jesus' miracle of abundance, the echo of the manna in the wilderness, where God's people were fed real food, a food that sustained them when lost in the desert.

This is God's long dream for humankind - that we all might live with more than enough, that our world might not be one of scarcity, but one of abundance. At the beginning in the creation story, Adam and Eve lived amid abundance, where the earth brought forth its harvests, where hunger was unknown, where the tilling and keeping of the garden was not a labor, but a joy. But, Adam and Eve made wrong choices, and one of the consequences was scarcity, as the earth yielded less bounty and the making of bread became a backbreaking chore.

Bread became something people hoarded. Kings and Pharaohs controlled access to it. Kingdoms were built and destroyed because of it. Joseph rose to power in Egypt because he was able to store the grain that was used for bread during times of drought, but when his descendants became plentiful, the Pharaoh realized that they could become dangerous and they were enslaved. As those former slaves wandered through the wilderness, the Bread of Heaven sustained them.

Tomorrow marks the 7-year anniversary since the violence in Charlottesville. Since that day, we have had violent protests in cities all around the country and an insurrection at our Nation's Capitol. White Supremacy has been on the rise for several years. But, if you strip down the hatred and racism to its core, you also will find a message of fear. Fear of change. Fear of scarcity. Fear that there is not enough to go around. Fear that there is not enough power, enough resources, enough bread. Fear that breeds hatred and violence and bigotry, as people desperately cling to what they think is only theirs to possess.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." And then he added, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus is reminding us that bread is for everyone. That God is the Source of Abundance; the One who promises that in the Age to Come no ruler, no Caesar, no president, no CEO would control the bread. Instead, there will be bread - bread for all, bread that will not lead to death, but abundant bread, the bread of life. Jesus tells us to pray for our *daily bread*, a radical vision if ever there was one - that bread shall be at the table, every table, every day. Bread is a gift of God.

And then, Jesus says, the Time of the Bread of Life, has arrived, "For the bread of God is the one descending out of heaven and imparting life to the cosmos!" (John 6:33). Bread shall no longer be a tool of empire, a product of toil, the reminder of slavery and sin. Bread will be again as it was intended, the life of all Creation.

Bread is real food and bread is the spiritual food of the Age to Come. In the same way that actual bread is transformed by air, so Jesus' bread is transformed by the Spirit. The bread of life *descends* from heaven; it is *cooked* with spiritual leaven. In another Gospel, Jesus says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough." (Matthew 13:33)

Just as inert porridge becomes infused with new life, its dough rising; so does creation, now sluggish in the sin of cruelty, injustice and hatred, slowly become yeasted. The bread of life has come, it sparks and bubbles among us, the table is set, and the blessing proclaimed. This is the wisdom of God, the miracle of Jesus: that all will be fed, that the ills of a world based on scarcity are passing, and that the time of abundance is here.

Thanks be to God, the maker of bread. Amen.

Invitation to Give

Paul calls us to be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, so we may give a fragrant offering

The fragrance of the bread of life rising and baking among us is a wonderful reminder of the new life which is arising in our beloved community. Let us bless the gifts given generously as we experience the fragrance of God's life rising in us.