

Bread of Life

Matthew 14:13-22

August 14, 2005 (An Intergenerational Worship Service)

Grains are one of the five food groups on the food pyramid. Nutrition experts recommend that Americans eat 6 ounces of grains every day. What form do our grains come in? bread, cereal, crackers, rice, pasta. More specific types include oatmeal, cornbread, tortillas, couscous, pretzels. What kinds of bread can you think of: sourdough, rye, wheat, white, pita, French, banana, and more! What kind of pasta do you like: spaghetti, macaroni, noodles, penne.

We're going to make bread dough this morning and think more about bread. A main ingredient in bread dough is flour. Flour comes from wheat that is grown and ground into this fine powder-like substance. Flour contains a protein substance called gluten. When it is mixed with liquid, stirred, and kneaded, the gluten stretches to form an elastic network that holds the gas bubbles created by the yeast.

Yeast is a leavening agent. It is a living plant. It grows in warm, moist dough. It gives off bubbles of gas that cause the dough to rise. Yeast needs to be mixed with warm water that is just the right temperature in order to dissolve. Sometimes yeast is called leaven, which means "to rise." It helps the dough blossom and grow.

We add sugar because it stimulates the yeast to produce the gas. It also helps the crust to brown and adds flavor to the bread.

We have to add some fat, such as butter, margarine, olive oil, or vegetable oil. It makes the bread tender and soft. It also helps the bread brown and taste good.

Salt enhances the flavor of the bread and also controls the growth of the yeast so that the dough rises more slowly and has a better texture.

Eggs add a golden color and rich flavor to make the bread more soft.

Bread baking dates back to the Stone Age. It began in earnest when many turned from a nomadic hunting life to a more settled existence which allowed for the cultivation of grain. The first bread was an unleavened wafer-thin cake, baked on hot stones. The Egyptians turned bread baking into a skilled craft. Their bread was leavened with yeast-rich foam scooped from the top of fermenting wine.¹

Jesus and his faith community had a special holiday in which bread was used. It was called Passover. During the dinner on Passover the Jews

tell the story of how their relatives many years ago were slaves in the country called Egypt. Slavery was very hard and the people asked God to rescue them from slavery. God called a man named Moses to help lead the people out of slavery. Suddenly one day Moses said to the people, "It's time to go. Hurry, we've got to go quickly." They had started making bread, but there was not time for the dough to rise before they left. They wrapped the dough up in their bowls and carried it with them. When they finally stopped to camp, they cooked the bread but it would not rise and get full. The yeast or leaven had died. So the bread they ate was unleavened bread. It didn't rise; it was flat. Jewish people have a Passover meal every year and remember that night when God rescued them from slavery. They eat unleavened bread to help them remember the story (Exodus 12).

During Jesus' time, there were two main food groups: bread and fish. They did not have grocery stores full of the boxes and cans of food, of the fruits and vegetables that we have. They had to grow, make, or catch all of their own food.

Today our Bible reading tells us about a day when the people wanted to be with Jesus. Jesus really needed some time away from them, so he took a boat across the lake. The people ran around the lake to meet Jesus when he landed! Jesus saw that they really loved him and wanted to be with them, so he had compassion for them. We might say that the people were hungry for Jesus and all that he had to teach them. Perhaps they too were grieving the death of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, for John had baptized some of them. The crowd gathered through the day as Jesus taught them, telling them stories that helped them understand who God was.

One parable Jesus told was about yeast. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Matthew 14:33). Yeast takes a while to work. It will take about an hour and a half before our dough doubles. Then we will divide it in two and wait another 45 minutes while it rises again in the bread pans before we put it in the oven. That's what it is like with the kingdom of heaven. It will take a while for it to come. We will have to be patient while God is working in the world and in our lives to make things better. God is kneading the dough until God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

Another lesson Jesus gave the people was when he said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). He meant that we need more than food for our bodies. We also need food for our souls. Sometimes when we think our stomachs are hungry, it is really our hearts and spirits

that are hungry. We need to come to worship, to read the Bible, to sing some songs, to pray to God. We're hungry for Jesus, for the Bread of Life.

Jesus fed the people's hearts with his stories and teachings. He told them about God, about how God wants us to live, and about how we can love one another. Then Jesus' disciples began to get hungry. It had been a long day. They told Jesus that it was time to stop talking. They wanted him to send the people away so they all could eat. Jesus didn't want to send the people away. He loved them so much that he wanted to feed them. He took the five loaves and two fish the disciples had. He prayed over the bread and fish. He broke the bread and fish into pieces. He gave them to the disciples, who gave them to the people in the crowd. All the people ate and felt full. And they even had leftovers to feed more.

Remember the five food groups that we are to eat: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat and beans. Jesus knew that there are two groups of bread that we need to eat: bread for our bodies and bread for our spirits. That's why he used bread as a sign of himself, calling himself the Bread of Life. Jesus knows that we need God in our lives. Today in communion we are going to feast on the Bread of Life. It's a way that we can remember Jesus' life and remember God's love for us.

One mother made pancakes for her family every Sunday morning. When she placed a plate of pancakes before each child she said, "Your mother makes the best pancakes in the whole world." Every Sunday morning that family ate pancakes for breakfast. With every plate, the mother said, "Your mother makes the best pancakes in the whole world."

Over time the children grew. One girl went off to college and traveled the world. She came home to visit and Sunday morning her mother served pancakes, saying, "Your mother makes the best pancakes in the whole world." Somewhat frustrated, she said, "Mom, why do you always say that. I've been at friend's houses and their moms make very good pancakes; sometimes they even taste better than yours. I've been in restaurants in different countries and some of their pancakes are fancier than yours."

Her mother answered, "Who do you think of when you eat pancakes?"

"I think of you, Mom."

"And how does it make you feel when you remember me," asked the mother.

"It makes me feel loved, Mom."

"That's why I've said it all these years, so that when you eat pancakes, wherever you are in the world, you will remember me, and feel my love with you always."

That's why we eat bread at communion. It reminds us of Jesus and of all he taught us about God. When we think of Jesus, we feel the love of Jesus and the love of God for us. Communion reminds us God and Jesus make the best bread in the whole world – the Bread of Life! During communion we remember that God and Jesus love us always!

¹ Lou Seibert Pappas, *Bread Baking* (San Leandro, CA: Bristol Publishing Enterprises, 1992), pp. 2-3.

The Rev. Lori Best Sawdon
Lafayette United Methodist Church