

Call to Worship

God of Healing and Transformation, we hunger and thirst for your abundant life.

**We bring you our sorrow and ask for the bread of joy;
we bring you our despair and ask for the bread of hope;
we bring you our weariness and ask for the bread of inspiration.**

Meet us here.

**We need the bread of heaven to sustain us as we journey to find our way,
that we may be one with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

The Word

John 6:25-35 Common English Bible

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him,

"Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Human One will give you. God the Father has confirmed him as his agent to give life."

They asked, "What must we do in order to accomplish what God requires?"

Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent."

They asked, "What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, *He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*"

Jesus told them, "I assure you, it wasn't Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!"

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Living the Word

"Bread of Heaven"

Pastor Cathy L. Hamblin

Today, bread comes in many forms: crusty, flat, soft, light or heavy, brown, yellow, white and warm. The forms vary as much as we vary as people.

5000 years ago: Leavened bread was probably made of a grain paste with some of the wine fermentation to make it rise over some time and then baked. When God told Moses to prepare the people for a hasty exit out of Egypt, he included the note, to them, that there wouldn't be time for the rising of the bread and so to bake it flat – unleavened.

After the escape the people of Israel complained to Moses and to God, that one of their main foods – the bread wasn't possible without the grain that they had left behind. They were in the desert and hungry. I often wonder if they had trusted God more and worried less, if it would have taken them about 39 ½ years less to find the promised land.

But God listened to their complaints and offered them a new form of bread called Manna. Along with the quail that were sent to them, they had enough to survive while they wandered around in the desert.

Bread still is a basic food staple. So many of our foods depend on some kind of bread to make them what they are. Peanut butter, sandwich meat, jelly, sandwiches, toast (in fact what would a toaster be without some form of bread?), hamburgers and hotdogs at picnics...the list goes on. It is part of the meal that fills us up. Growing up on the farm, bread and butter were a part of every meal. Mom might say "If you're still hungry, have another piece of bread."

What does it take to bring bread to your table? First the farmer has to prepare the field – plowing, fertilizing the soil and plant the seeds; labor intensive. Next is the wait...for the crop to grow. We all have seen first-hand, what can happen if there isn't enough moisture for the plants; farming is risky business. When it is time to harvest, once the wheat stems are yellow and the kernels are dry, they are cut from the stem with a scythe or a combine and taken as soon as possible to a local grain elevator for milling.

From there it is bagged for sale. Each of those processes take tools, processing time and labor. That simple loaf of bread isn't so simple. I know that some of you have gluten issues, but soy flour and rice flour take just as much effort to get ready for those breads.

Also as I was growing up if mom needed to keep me busy she would give me a large piece of freezer paper, a sears catalog, a scissors and a bowl of homemade glue and tell me to design a house with rooms. It was a fun project and kept me busy for many minutes. To my amazement as I grew older, I found out the glue was just flour and water mixed together. Those are the same two main ingredients of bread: flour and water. Of course we put many other things into that glue to make bread tastier, taller, and more filling.

My grandma Nana lived next door to us and she would invite me over when she was making fresh bread and rolls. Once the bread was mixed, and kneaded and raised in her big silver bowl she would break off just the right amount and roll it in her hands to make perfect rolls for home or church or sick neighbors. I still like to make fresh rolls, but I go to the grocery and by the frozen dough, let it raise and bake it. It's not at all the same as Nana's, but still very good!

Jesus often took common items from the lives of the people to illustrate his stories and messages. Bread was also a staple of the diet of Jesus' day. Today's scripture begins as a bit cryptic, but it is easily explained when you read the first 25 verses of chapter 6, which tell of the feeding of 5000 people from a small boys lunch of five loaves and two fish. After the miracle of the meal, when everyone had eaten their fill, there was leftover bread amounting to 12 large baskets.

That night was the miracle of Jesus walking on the water as he crossed the lake. Each of these miracles were to convince the disciples and the crowds that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The crowds followed him to the other side of the lake - John 6:

*When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him,
"Rabbi, when did you get here?"*

Jesus replied, "I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life,

Is Jesus saying that the crowd is following him to receive the next meal rather than the next miracle? How about us? Why are we following Christ? To observe the miracles or to receive them? They do still happen and they are for each of us.

*...eternal life, which the Human One will give you. God the Father has confirmed him as his agent to give life."
The crowd asked, "What must we do in order to accomplish what God requires?"*

Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent."

...Jesus is the Bread of Heaven. He is telling them to believe in him, sent from God for the sake of all people. Like the bread, Jesus is a simple, basic staple for our lives. Jesus can fill the emptiness inside of us, the void in our lives. One of our hymns has these words: "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land. / I am weak, but Thou art mighty; / Hold me with Thy powerful hand. Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven: feed me till I want no more, feed me till I want no more.

The people asked, "What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do?"

We want proof, they have just experienced the miracle of the 5000 people being fed, and once again they are beginning to expect more. The bread is simple, but Jesus is not. Just as there is a lengthy and complex process to get from field to loaf, it can be lengthy and complex to get from unbelief to belief in Jesus.

Even so, just as bread is fairly easy for us to acquire, so is Christ. The difficulties in the process of getting there have more to do with our surrender and desire to know Christ, than with receiving the miracle of salvation once we just accept the grace that God wants to give us.

As with Nana, it took years of practice to get those homemade rolls just right. Likewise, we have to work on our relationship with Christ continually, not just when we feel hungry and need Jesus to feed us. Without the paste that mom made to hold my dream pictures together, my dreams just stayed in my head. Like that flour water paste, Jesus is the one that gives us the dreams of peace and love fulfilled from our Creator, God; paste that holds all of our dream pictures together.

What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Jesus told them, "I assure you, it wasn't Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

It wasn't Moses, who was only human. We also cannot do it for ourselves. It is a free gift and it comes from God. Jesus comes to feed us from our Creator. That is a miracle because as humans we really do not deserve all that God would have for us. Yet the grace of God makes it all possible when we are ready to receive Jesus and all that he is for us.

So they said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!"

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

...Do we want it all of the time? Don't we say at least once a week: "Give us today our daily bread?" But do we realize what exactly we are asking for? Jesus, the Bread of Heaven. Jesus asked the disciples at the last supper to remember him in the eating of the bread. How do you remember Jesus and all that he is for you as you receive this gift of the bread? Jesus is saying, that if you seek him in your life, continuously, you will never be hungry or thirsty.

There is a seldom used tradition in the church that I want to share with you this morning...I found these words in the United Methodist Book of Worship: *The Love Feast, is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with the disciples during his ministry and expressing community, sharing and fellowship enjoyed by the family of Christ.*

Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord's Supper, the two services became quite distinct and should not be confused with each other. While the Lord's supper has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, the Love Feast has appeared only at certain times and among certain denominations.

The modern history of the Love Feast began when Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Germany introduced a service of food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727. John Wesley first experienced it among the Moravians in Savannah, Georgia, 10 years later. His diary notes: "After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. It was begun and ended with thanksgiving and prayer, and celebrated in so decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ."

It quickly became a feature of the Evangelical Revival and a regular part of the Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and throughout the English-speaking world. As Methodists immigrated to North America they made Love Feasts an important part of early American Methodism.

While Love Feasts became less frequent in the years that followed, they continued to be held in some places; and in recent years the Love Feast has been revived. Most Love Feasts include the sharing of food. It is customary not to use communion bread, wine, or grape juice because to do so might confuse the Love Feast with the Lord's Supper.

The bread may be a loaf of ordinary bread, crackers, rolls, or a sweet bread baked especially for this service. If a loaf of bread, it may be broken in two or more pieces and then passed hand to hand as each person breaks off a piece.

During the meal there may be informal conversation in Christian fellowship, or the leader may direct the conversation by suggesting matters of mutual concern, or there may be spontaneous witnessing and praise.

I am not going to direct your conversation, so allow yourselves some informal conversation. If anyone feels moved by the Holy Spirit to spontaneous witnessing and praise, let us all have open minds and hearts...

The following prayer by Charles Wesley was written especially for the Love Feast and recommended for use at all Love Feasts by both John and Charles Wesley:

*Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
that true immortal bread.*

*Grant us and all our race
In Jesus Christ to prove
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
the manna of thy love. Amen.*

The word feast doesn't mean a crumb. I invite the person on the aisle to take the bread break off a decent size piece and pass it to the next until all have been served.