

As a part of the children's time, baskets of bread were passed throughout the congregation with breads from around the world: pita and lavash from the Middle East, pumpernickel from Eastern Europe, French bread, sourdough from California, naan from India, bagels from Eastern Europe and gluten free wheat bread. Everyone received at least one slice of bread as the baskets were passed by the children until all the bread was gone. The congregation was invited to eat their bread during the sermon.

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For the next five Sundays we will be hearing about bread. Along with Jesus, bread will be the star of the show. Jesus will bless bread. People will eat bread. People will chase after Jesus to get more bread. And Jesus will also say that he himself is the Bread of Life.

So, knowing that this is the summer of bread, bread, bread- it seemed fitting that we should have some. Real bread. And to make things more interesting – more than one kind of bread.

I am hoping that when we are done, there won't be baskets and baskets of leftover pieces, because as we start this time together, I want you to remember being here - and eating bread.

I also thought it might be smart to remind us of the importance and significance of bread. For the past few decades, bread's reputation has taken a bit of a hit, but I still love it. If asked to choose, I'm not sure which would be harder to give up – good bread or good chocolate.

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Bread, in all its various forms, is the most widely consumed food in the world. It is a great source of carbohydrates which help your body produce and store energy. And it's convenient.

You can carry it with you. Put it in your pocket. You can dress it up or down. Make a sandwich or just eat it plain. All of which helps to explain why bread has been a part of our diet for at least 30,000 years.

Those who have studied the history of bread would argue that it was central to the formation of early human societies. Wheat was first domesticated in the western half of Asia. Its use spread north and west to Europe and North Africa. And this in turn led to the formation of towns, because you simply can't grow wheat and be a nomad. People had to settle down and become farmers if they wanted to have bread. The same thing happened in eastern Asia with rice and in the Americas with maize.

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When I was a kid, my mother would warn that I shouldn't fill up on bread at the beginning of the meal. I needed to save room for the main course. But oh, fresh baked bread was always such a treat.

On the flip side, when my mom was growing up, bread was a cheap and easy way to feed a hungry family. There was bread on the table at every meal. Nothing fancy, just homemade bread that helped to stretch the grocery budget. My mother grandmother would tell her kids, if they were still hungry at the end of the meal, there was always bread.

That's the phrase that's been running through my head all week long. "There's always bread." There's something solid and comforting about that idea.

About fifteen years ago I spent a week at Holden Village, which is a Lutheran retreat center in Washington State. At the beginning of the week, when new folks would arrive at Holden, it was explained that the only community rule was that you come to Evening Prayer every night.

For me, my memory of that place has been shaped by that daily worship and by the bread that was baked and offered every day. At any time, day or night, you were welcome to come to the dining hall and have bread. It was like a promise. There was always bread. It made me unreasonably happy. It's one of my best memories about that place. You could always have bread.

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I hope, I hope that each of you has your own good memories about bread. As we learn more about gluten allergies, I am finding that it makes bread not less important, but more important. How can we offer bread to that is truly satisfying to all who are hungry? I suspect there is a whole other sermon in that, but we'll leave it for another day.

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That may be more than you wanted to hear about bread but trust me – it may come in handy before August is over.

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The story or stories that are told in today's text are found in all four gospels, but John's take is a bit different from the other three. For one thing, John tells us that this happens right before the celebration of Passover – the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is by far the most important Jewish festival and by placing these events within that time frame, John alludes to Moses.

If you think of Passover, then you're bound to think of Moses who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And if you think about the Israelites then you're going to remember that they were a bunch of whiners who kept asking Moses for better food. And if you remember the whining, then you'll certainly remember manna - the mysterious bread from heaven that God provided daily until the Israelites were able to settle down, grow wheat and make some bread of their own. Which of course, they served on Passover when they remembered being rescued from slavery in Egypt. Setting the scene as Passover, is a short cut to reminding the readers of all kinds of background data.

John also gives us some geographical info which places Jesus on "the other side of the Sea of Galilee" which is basically in the middle of nowhere. And when you think about a man of God out in the middle of nowhere – again the expectation is that of course, you'll think of Moses. This may seem like a lot of over thinking – but it's a consistent take on John's version of the feeding of the 5,000.

In a commentary on this text, Bishop Craig Satterlee, points out that John claims Jesus is testing Philip. And he says, "Do you suppose Philip recalled that God rained bread from heaven, and each day the people were to gather enough for that day, and in this way, God tested them, [to see] whether they would follow God's instruction or not?"

Well if Philip knew he was being tested, it doesn't help him pass. Jesus asks where they should buy bread and Philip answers by telling Jesus about the huge amount of amount of money they'll need to get the job done. Andrew on the other hand offers up a little boy's lunch, assuming it will be of no help, but Jesus feeds the people. With a few little loaves and a couple of fish, he feeds 5,000 people.

(By the way, in those days, when heads were counted, they only counted the men. So, the number 5,000 only refers to the men who were present and does not include the women and children who were also fed that day.)

The people, of course, were wowed by everything that happened. They'd been hoping and praying that God might send them someone to save them. Another Elijah, or better yet another Moses! And here comes Jesus. He must be the next great prophet and so they confuse him with Moses. They're sure he's a new messenger from God rather than recognizing that he is God. They saw Jesus as someone who might save them from the tyrants who were ruling their country. They were sure he was going to save them like Moses saved their ancestors.

It's tempting to wonder why they couldn't see Jesus for who he really is. How can they all be so confused? Peter, Andrew, the crowds...all of them. Are they foolish? Or uninformed? Or on the wrong side?

No, I think the truth is that they were faithful people. When they saw what Jesus had done - when they saw the wonders he could do – they knew he was from God. It wasn't just about the bread. They believed that Jesus had a holy connection, but their understanding of what that might mean, was limited to someone like Moses.

The best they could imagine, the very best would be another mighty prophet like Moses who could save them from Rome and restore their country to its former glory. Just as Moses had rescued the Israelites from Egypt.

They were hungry for something grand and mighty, but that's not what Jesus was offering them.

They were so excited about the miracle, **but for Jesus** – it was simply a way to take care of people in need not a way to get attention or to prove his power or skills.

The real food he was offering them was in his words and deeds of love. That's what he wanted them to fill up on.

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When the people catch up with Jesus again, on the other side of the Sea, he'll ask them why they are there? Are they only there because they want more bread? More food? Are they in it for the fish sandwiches?

But you can always have bread.

What Jesus will offer is far better. Far more than they can imagine

It is the daily strength and food for what ails us. It's the grace which keeps us going. It's the love of God embodied.

Someone once said that in John's gospel, Jesus only does miracles for a reason- to care for someone in need. In this case it is because people are in the middle of nowhere and they're hungry. They came to see him, and he is responding out of love. It's a gift. They came looking for one thing, but they go home with something else. They thought they witnessed the return of Moses but it's not God's messenger but God. The God who with love for all – proclaims that grace is always abundant. And that forgiveness is more than just a possibility, it's a reality. All the things we truly need for daily living can be found in Jesus Christ. You can always have bread. The living bread from heaven.

You can always fill up on bread.