

Proper 13 B  
August 5th, 2018  
St. John 6:24-35  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

### **“I am the Bread of Life.”**

What does it mean for God to say that God is the bread of life?

Bread. It is common. We experience it almost daily. It is necessary for our sustenance. When I was young, commercials led me to beg my mother to buy “Wonder Bread,” which “builds strong bodies 12 ways.” I must confess, I was drawn in by the colorful balloons on the packaging, rather than the pitch about all the healthy vitamins. There was also “Sunbeam” bread, which was “batter-whipped” and advertisements pledged that it would lack the holes that other breads had, as if you got more bread for your money with the 12 oz. Sunbeam loaf than the 12 oz. Wonder-bread loaf. Not so. And if you think about it, it is the air holes that give various breads their distinctive flavor.

Today, you would think few would be caught buying these “off the shelf loaves” of bread. Now the hot item, literally, is Artisanal Bread, baked in smaller quantities and having the air of hand formed, bake-shop bread. Yes they are flavorful. And yes, the texture of them is delightful. And they taste delicious! Both types of breads will sustain you. It is often a question of what you can afford in your budget. I shop in places where people are on limited incomes and take advantage of the .99-cent store brand special of 3 loaves for \$2.50. It will sustain you. Our Foodshare guests would look for such bargains. Several of them commented to me how delicious the Ezekiel Bread that we distributed two weeks ago was, how it was a real treat.

“Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” The bread we buy at the store will perish: it goes bad around the end of sale date or a few days after. So we buy a new loaf. But what of our spiritual lives? What will sustain us as we walk through this life?

What does it mean for Jesus to refer to himself in such common terms? Why does he say that he is the bread of life?

On Friday evenings, as the sun goes down, Jewish families have gathered for a special meal for centuries. There is what we would call an “artisanal” loaf, baked

by the family, and before the meal begins, it is uncovered on a special plate, a prayer of thanksgiving is offered, the bread is broken into pieces and shared with each family member around the table.

The meal that we gather for this morning finds its roots in that ritual. We gather around a dinner table that we call an altar, we give thanks and pray over the bread, which is placed on a special plate and then it is broken into pieces and shared with those gathered for the meal.

The metaphor is quite strong: bread is accessible to everyone. It is affordable. It will keep you from going hungry. In depression years, when families were dirt poor, a meal might be a slice of stale bread with some catsup spread upon it. Not very appealing, but it kept our parents and grandparents from starving in those tight years that produced a fear of scarcity in many.

Scarcity is dispelled by the presence of bread, fresh or stale. An unopened loaf of bread reminds us of abundance. There will be enough. I have enough. If we think about the source of the bread and are not ego-centric, we offer thanks to God for providing us with food, shelter, clothing and so much else. Last week, Jesus took 7 loaves of bread and blessed them and fed 5,000 people. And there were 12 baskets of pieces left over after everyone had had their fill.

Bread reminds me that God feeds us abundantly, both physically and spiritually. I have no need to worry. When we gather at the altar each week, it falls to me to estimate how much of the communion bread we will be needing. In my 40 years of experience doing this, I have never led a service where there was not enough communion bread for those assembled. There is a metaphor there: In God's economy there is always an abundance. No one is turned away. No one goes away hungry. All are fed. This is our God. By extension, at St. George's, there is always an abundance of food at our social hour after church. No one need go away physically hungry as we break bread together there and participate in the community which is God's living body.

What is this bread of which God speaks? It is Jesus present among us and to us. It is the love of God with which we are fed. The words of Jesus are also bread to sustain and feed us. "It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

How does this bread give life to the world? The bread points us to the right side of the dichotomies of this world: to the security of abundance instead of scarcity and

fear; to the positives in life instead of the negatives; to peace instead of division. to hope instead of hopelessness; and to love instead of hatred. So where these are found, God is in the midst of us. Where there is scarcity, fear, negativity, division, hopelessness and hatred, these are far from God, though when God's presence and love is inserted, they may be driven away. It is for us to go forth and share this bread of God with others and to change the world around us with these gifts of living from gratitude and abundance, accentuating the positive in each other's lives, bringing hope to wherever we can give it, being peacemakers when we can be, and always learning to be better lovers. This is what bread represents to us: something so simple, so common, and so needed. This is the bread that brings life.

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” AMEN.