

11th Sunday after Pentecost-B
August 8, 2021
Nebraska Synod, ELCA
Rev. Megan Morrow

John 6:35, 41-51

“Jesus is the Bread of Life”

Many of us love bread: sandwich bread, bagels, rolls, buns, French Bread, pita bread...you name it - we love to eat it!

Have you ever made bread, or had home-made bread? The kind that has fresh ingredients and is kneaded by hand, takes time to let it rise, then comes out of the oven warm, smelling and tasting heavenly?

But even though it was delicious bread and good-for-you bread made of fresh ingredients that was full of flavor and tasted like it had come from heaven, it was still just bread. Eating that bread might feed us for life here, but it wouldn't give us life beyond this life.

Jesus says in our Gospel lesson for this morning, “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate 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...”

The bread that we love to eat tastes good for that moment and makes us feel fed for that moment, but the moment passes and we'll get hungry again. And even if it's good healthy bread that helps us live longer, it won't prevent us from dying. Only Jesus is the Bread of Life.

We have lots of things like that in our lives, don't we? Things that feed us for the moment or are even good for us here in this life, but that ultimately won't save us in the end. Some of them even get equated with bread!

Money is sometimes called bread. We say that we're earning our daily bread when we go to work to earn the money that pays the rent or the mortgage or the electric bill, etc. Sometimes in our American slang we call money "dough". "I need some dough to get me through," you might say, meaning that you need some money to pay for something you think you need.

Money is one of those things that's pretty important to our survival here in this life and that feeds us for the moment and might even help us live longer by buying us good food, medical care, a place to live and labor-saving devices that save wear and tear on our bodies. Even when we do good things with it and give it away or invest it so that it will do wonderful things for others after we're gone, money can't buy us or anyone we give it to eternal life. And you can't take it with you, as they say. You don't ever see a moving van following the casket to the cemetery. Only Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Food is bread, too. We spend a lot of our time and energy on producing food, selling food, getting food, making food, eating food. Our world has a lot of people and feeding them all is quite an undertaking, but we here in the U.S. have taken the whole food thing to new heights.

Think about our supermarkets and the tons of brands of one food item there might be. Just think of the bread aisle -- all kinds of sizes and shapes and flavors and Ethnic forms of bread to choose from. That's true in the canned food aisle, the produce aisle, the frozen food aisle, etc.

And think of our restaurants. We have restaurants on every corner, and yet we argue over where we want to eat. Even during a pandemic, we have come up with options to make sure to support restaurants and continue to have options through deliveries, drive-thrus, outdoor seating. Many of us have been involved in increased giving to food pantries and backpack programs and hunger relief to make sure that people have enough to eat during this uncertain time. Many across Nebraska are involved in food production and have kept growing and harvesting and distributing even through the pandemic to make sure the world has enough to eat.

Whatever food we like, whatever food we grow or work to produce, whatever food we eat, whatever food we sell or give away, it only feeds us for a moment or for this life. Only Jesus is the Bread of Life.

In other words, Jesus is teaching in Chapter 6 of John's Gospel that he's the main thing you really need to sink your teeth into and invest your life and health in. When all the other things are gone, Jesus is the only one who will still be there. He's the one who will feed you into eternity and carry you from death to life.

Perhaps you or your family has experienced a death recently. Someone you've known and loved died. Maybe you had the privilege of being with them as they took their last breath. It's a powerful thing, a hard thing, to be with someone as they pass away. Perhaps you work in health care and you've seen many deaths. Certainly those who have been on the front lines during the pandemic have had to face the reality of death and dying way too often. It is a reality that life is a precious thing and death is an eventual reality for all of us.

And yet, even if we are physically alone at the time of our death, we are never completely alone. Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Breath of Life, is with us to carry us from death to Life with him eternally. Death is not the last word on our lives; Jesus makes Eternal Life the last word.

We might be hungry in this life and we might be thirsty in this life. We might suffer and endure pain and uncertainty in this life, but when we eat the Bread of Life, we won't ever be devoured by that hunger or thirst, pain or uncertainty.

These next few weeks are a time when people finish their summer travels and gear up for the Fall school and program year. It's a new beginning for school students and teachers and staff. It's an exciting time, but it's also a time of many unknowns as we head into another year in a pandemic. There are questions and uncertainties, fears and hopes both. What will sustain you in the midst of it? Jesus, the Bread of Life, can and does sustain you in ways nothing and no one else can.

What will you let go of this year in order to make time for nourishing yourself with the Word of God that can feed you with the Bread of Life? What will you help your kids let go of this year in order to help them be fed by the food that doesn't perish but lasts into eternity?

We want to give our kids and our loved ones the best. Giving them the Bread of Life is THE Best thing we can give them!

We struggle and wrestle with all the things that pull at us and vie for our attention, time and money. And we have some sort of U.S. cultural idea that we can have it all if we just work hard enough or juggle things well enough. But ultimately, the only food that lasts is the Bread of Life. Without it the balls certainly won't stay in the air, the many things on our schedules and to-do lists aren't worth much. They're like empty calories without the true Bread.

Come to Christ's table. Eat the Bread of Life – Jesus's Body broken in love for you. He knows you try and struggle, and wants to help you, wants to let you know how much strength he can provide, wants to let you know how full you can feel rather than empty. Come and be fed with the love of God in Christ Jesus – the Bread of Life. Amen.