

Morning Prayer
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 14, Tract A
John 6:35, 41-51
August 11, 2024

Let the words of my mouth and meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

When was the last time you walked into Buttery Bake House on Old St. or Buttermilk Bake Shop on E. Bank St, or Panera Bread?

The first thing that hits me when I enter any of these places or any other bakery is the smell. The aroma of fresh baked bread... the yeast, the grains, the nuts, the dried fruits. I can smell the rich flavors and taste the complex textures with my nose. These are the sorts of breads invoked by Jesus's claim of "I am the bread of life." The follow up claim by Jesus, "Those who come to me shall not hunger" elicits thoughts of a hearty, nutritious, multi-textured bread.

What is your usual bread of choice?

When I was growing up it was "Wonder Bread." That soft, squishy textured bread, always the same size and in the bag with iconic red, yellow and blue logo. I loved it as a child. It was (and is) the perfect bread for a PB&J or a BLT. A slice of American cheese fits perfectly on a slice of Wonder Bread to make that ideal grilled cheese sandwich. Mass produced and available in most grocery stores, it is affordable, predictable, and pre-sliced so there is automatic portion control. But Wonder Bread by itself is pretty tasteless. It doesn't have its own nutrients, just those vitamins that are added during production. Preservatives are added to keep it fresh longer.

However, I don't think this is the type of bread Jesus was referring to when he said, "I am the bread of life."

What kind of bread comes to mind when you think of Jesus calling himself the Bread of Life? Pita bread? brown bread that we sometimes think of being served at the last supper?

But even those are not what most contemporary churches use for communion. In the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Catholic traditions, we often use communion wafers.

Is this the bread of life to which Jesus likened himself?

This passage from John's gospel is about abundance. When we think of the plain white, pre-sliced, mass-produced Wonder Bread it is abundant in availability

but is it abundant in nutrients? Abundant in flavors? textures? Is there a variety of colors, shapes, and smells?

Consider a sampling of breads from local bakeries or those you make at home:

Croissants County Sourdough Bread Focaccia Banana Bread with Pecans
Tomato Basil Bread Cinnamon Raisin Bagels Blueberry Muffins Cornbread
multi-grain bread Blue Corn Tortillas Zucchini Bread
and the list could go on.

Our lives, like bread, are enriched with various grains, fruits, nuts, and spices. To turn that around: When Jesus spoke of himself as bread, as the Bread of Life,

is it possible that he was speaking of richness, texture, and flavor?

That he was inviting us to a greater feast in our life of faith?

If this vision of bread given to us in John's Gospel teaches us something about Jesus, keep in mind is that Jesus is not plain, not simple, not undemanding, not a clone of others. He is multi-textured, multifaceted, and complex in flavor. He calls us to love, to forgive, to encourage and to get involved. He shows us how to welcome, to persist, and to stand firm. Our Lord enjoyed sharing meals with strangers and disciples and he rebuked the careless. Jesus taught in the temple, raised to dead, challenged the complacent to care, wept over the death of a friend and told stories. He drank wine at a wedding, washed filthy feet, and he prayed.

When we hear Jesus proclaim, I am the bread of life, let us hear all these things and more. As we live our lives and live in our faith, let us be rich in texture, of bold flavor and nourishing to the world. No more white, “Wonder Bread” in our love of God, but abundant life, abundant living, abundant faith.

When we eat those breads from the local bakery it is more than processed identically sliced white bread, more than just something to hold our pb&j. The breads in the bakery are full of textures, complex taste, nutrients and satisfy our hunger. So it is with Jesus, the Bread of Life. So, it should be in our life of faith; delicious, satisfying and filling our hearts with love.

Amen