

**Rev. Ellen R. Dawson | October 4, 2020**  
**“Give Us This Bread” | Exodus 16:1-4, 11-15, 31 and John 6:26-38**

**Exodus 16:1-4, 11-15, 31 (NIV)**

*1 The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” 4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.*

*11 The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 12 “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’” 13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.*

*31 The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.*

**John 6:26-38 (NIV)**

*26 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”*

*28 Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” 29 Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” 30 So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”*

*32 Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

*34 “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”*

*35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*

This week, I found myself sitting at the table in the corner at Panera Bread in Oakmont typing out my sermon while I listened to the various customers ordering soups and salads; the pager buzzing on a nearby table signifying someone's order was ready; and the *70's & 80's Rock Mix* playing in the background.

It's fitting, I thought, that I wrote this at Panera, seeing that the focus of today's scripture is on the same thing this restaurant is known for: Bread! From Asiago bagels to their loaves of Artisan Ciabatta, from the Black Pepper Focaccia to the Sourdough Bread Bowl, this company thrives on American's love of carbohydrates!

Today, however, we look beyond our congregation and our country out into the world, seeing and sensing how we are connected with our brothers and sisters from around the globe. World Communion Sunday, was first celebrated back in 1933 out of an attempt to bring churches together in Christian unity. It was Rev. Dr. Hugh Thomasan Kerr, the pastor at Shadyside Presbyterian Church right here in Pittsburgh, who conceived of the idea and worked to start a tradition where on one Sunday a year, churches all over the world would celebrate communion to be reminded of our common faith and interconnectedness.

The organization *Global Ministries* defines World Communion Sunday in this way:

*World Communion Sunday offers congregations a distinctive opportunity to experience Holy Communion in the context of the global community of faith. The first Sunday of October has become a time when Christians in every culture break bread and pour the cup to remember and affirm Christ as the Head of the Church. On that day, they remember that they are part of the whole body of believers. Whether shared in a grand cathedral, a mud hut, outside on a hilltop, in a meetinghouse, or in a storefront, Christians celebrate the communion liturgy in as many ways as there are congregations. World Communion Sunday can be both a profound worship experience and a time for learning more about our wider community of faith.<sup>1</sup>*

Back in April on Maundy Thursday, another day where churches are known to participate in the sacrament of communion, I shared about the symbolism of the cup and the wine, and how the cup is used as a sign of commitment for the Jewish people, as it was a part of the tradition and process of getting engaged. Once a "bride price" was negotiated between the father of the groom and the father of the bride, the young man's father would hand his son a cup of wine.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.globalministries.org/special\\_days\\_wcs\\_world\\_communion\\_sunday\\_ideas](https://www.globalministries.org/special_days_wcs_world_communion_sunday_ideas)

The son, in turn, would offer it to the woman and say, "This cup I offer to you." In effect he was saying, "I love you, I choose you, and I offer you my life. Will you marry me"? If she drank it, she sealed their engagement, accepting his life and giving him hers. It also harkens back to when Jesus asked his Father the night before he died, "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus knew the high price he would have to pay to purchase and commit to his bride -- us, the church.

Today, I wish to share about the symbolism and the significance of the bread as the Body of Christ.

As I read in the book of Exodus, bread becomes, very early on in our faith history, a symbol of God's provision. God provided manna, not just because the people grumbled, but because God knew they needed the bread to literally survive. So, when we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we are reminded that God — Jehovah Jireh — is a Lord who provides. God has already promised to provide what you need every day, in sometimes unexpected, miraculous ways.

An unexpected (yet prophesied), miraculous way God provided for us was in and through the Word Incarnate, Jesus, our Savior, who was born in Bethlehem. But what does his *birth* have to do with the bread on our communion table? Bethlehem, in Hebrew, means House of Bread. Even from birth, Jesus feeds our souls with something we must have to spiritually survive: grace, love, Emmanuel, God with us.

We also know that Jesus was the physical embodiment of God's holy word. The Word made flesh. Since Jesus is the bread of life, we can make the connection that the Bible feeds us spiritually. In fact, Jesus, when tempted in the desert after his baptism, was told to turn a stone into bread. There was nothing Jesus could have wanted more after days and days of fasting...How did Jesus respond? He said "Man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4).

Bread is also, since the time of Moses, a sign and symbol of God's Holy presence. Twelve loaves of bread, called showbread, were laid on the wooden table on the north side of the Holy Place of the temple. (Exodus 25:30; Leviticus 24:5-9). These loaves, called the bread of His Presence, were often brought as a thanksgiving from people and used as offerings.

So, when Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life,” he wasn’t just making up a catchy analogy. Jesus was referring to the presence of God’s holiness, the words of scripture that feed our souls, his prophesied birthplace, and God’s provision in the desert.

Today, of course, we use bread during communion to remember Jesus’ broken body and the redemption on the cross. He commanded us to share the bread in remembrance of Him. But also, in remembrance of his presence, provision, and grace.

Because today is World Communion Sunday, I invite you to consider the different types of bread that is baked daily all around the world. Tortillas being patted and placed on a metal comal in Guatemala; Moroccan Ksra (kes-rah) rising before the caraway seeds are placed on top and baked in the oven; Chapati and Naan being used instead of utensils to scoop up lentils in India; Pita bread being filled with goodies in Greece; steaming hot Challah being sliced on the Sabbath in Israel.

Bread is a common food, a staple of the diet, all over our globe.

Do you think, perhaps, Jesus knew that bread would mean something significant to everyone, everywhere?

Consider the conversation that happens in today's text. And remember, this exchange happens the day after Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In verse 30, a crowd of people approach Jesus, the Rabbi, to ask him more questions. They demand a sign. They want to see something: proof that Jesus is who he says he is. And here, they challenge Jesus by basically saying “our ancestors got bread right out of heaven, what have you got to give us?”

As Dale Bruner explains, “They are intentionally contrasting Moses with Jesus. Moses fed several hundred thousand people over forty years; Jesus fed five thousand people in one afternoon. Moses’ manna came from heaven; Jesus’ bread came from a little boy’s lunch. Moses’ bread was divine manna; Jesus’ bread was cheap barley. In sum ‘Moses gave us huge, long-term, heaven-sent wonders, and if you’re this big Son of Man you now seem to be talking about, you out to be able to prove yourself superior to Moses. Give us a bigger-than-Moses-size-miracle!’

Even face-to-face with the Messiah himself, people wanted more.

Jesus' response to them was this: *"It was not Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven -- notice that is past tense -- but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven."* Christ continues to explain, in the present tense: *"For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*

How do they respond? They say, "Oh, well we want that! Give us this bread."

Jesus then declares that he is that bread that they are asking for, declaring, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

German theologian Ernst Haenchen explains Christ's claim "I am the Bread of Life" this way: "This claim assumes that the world can never satisfy man. Everything that the world has to offer is unsatisfying, alienating, or better, makes one restless. [The human] is afflicted with dissatisfaction, boredom, anxiety, and care. [They are] unable to find that authentic rest, that true peace, that goal for which it is rewarding to live and strive."

Hunger is a universal feeling. People walk around dissatisfied every day. In the North, South, East and West, humans are always wanting and craving something more. And this isn't just across the miles, this is across the ages.

When we are hungry, we get something to eat. When we are thirsty, we get something to drink. Just like all of the practical difficulties we are faced with each and every day: when we have a problem, we find a solution. At least, that's how it is with the material problems of our material world. But what Jesus offers to them -- and to us -- in this, his first "I Am" statement in the Gospel of John, is bread that will satisfy a spiritual hunger, a heavenly craving.

And Jesus presents this as an invitation. What they wanted, he would not give. And what he offered, they had to receive. When they ask him "what must we do to get that food that endures to eternal life?" Jesus says, "Believe in the one the Father has sent." Just believe.

Brothers and sisters, we still walk around dissatisfied, restless, hungry. Our sin makes us feel empty. Our selfishness sucks us dry. Day after day, year after year, the human race continues to let wars happen, to let poverty exist, to pollute the skies and the rivers, to let party lines, policies and laws cause not just division, but hate. Hate.

Aren't we craving peace, equality, clean air? Do we or do we not want a nation and a world where no child goes hungry, no person is abused, no voice is silenced?

Where Democrats and Republicans can sit down at a table and share a meal together, listening, telling stories about their experiences, having a civil, peaceful, respectful discussion about the different views we hold?

Where all people - no matter what gender, race, socioeconomic status or political party - can break bread together?

That is possible. It is happening all over the world today. Setting aside our differences, we all declare our faith and say "give us this bread." We celebrate our common belief in a Lord who provides, in a God who forgives, in a Savior who loves us and reminds us that we, too, are to love one another.

So the next time you feel a physical hunger and your stomach growls, or you feel empty, restless, or dissatisfied about something in your life, remember the words of Jesus: I am the bread of life. Take a moment to stop, close your eyes, breathe in, and picture yourself sitting at his feet with open hands, and ask him to provide. Ask him to nourish your soul. Ask Jesus to help you remember the love that connects us to believers all over the world who are also hoping and praying for God's Kingdom to Come, for God's will to be done, for the daily bread that fills and satisfies all our needs.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.