

The Bread of Life

John 6:22-35 8-02-09

My middle daughter, Jennifer, has become a talented baker of breads: ciabatta, sourdough, foccacia, and the latest on her food blog, Pan Marino—rosemary bread. She loves to create beautiful scented loaves in all shapes and sizes from scratch and they always seem to turn out well. She has even managed to get me to keep a jug of sourdough starter on my counter that should be used far more often than it has been. I don't always have the three days time or the patience it takes to turn starter into loaves. I booted it back into life yesterday and it will await my return in the fridge. We are hoping when we are all together in Wisconsin for a bit that Jen will turn out a loaf or two for a few family meals.

There is something very elemental to all cultures about bread. Whether it is in the form of pitas, tortillas, whole wheat, Wonder Bread or Naan, it helps sustain life. The manna in the wilderness, showered down on Moses and the children of Israel, was a fine filling bread. Bread is so essential to us that it has been called “the staff of life”—the very essence of all that is.

Jesus referred to himself as “the bread of life” in this morning’s scripture reading. He told those who followed him, after they had been fed on the hillside with loaves and fishes, that the kind of bread he was, was not the type that satisfied physical hunger. That bread was gone in an instant. He was the eternal bread—that nurturing substance that would sustain them over and over again as they faced the difficulties life would bring them.

The bread of life he offered came through his life and teachings. Sustenance came through the revelations of the nature of God he gave them, the promises of a better life to come that was available to all if they had eyes to see and ears to hear the good news he brought. They would never be hungry again if they believed in him as the special one sent by God.

When we are in our darkest times, when we feel there is no human help that can sustain us, we often remember scriptures we have heard. Sometimes these words of comfort come to us from long ago; from some Sunday school class our parents made us go to years before. They may come to our minds from the Hebrew Scriptures or they may come from the New Testament. Wherever it is they come from, they offer us comfort when we need it the most.

I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in

From this time on and forevermore.

Beautiful words.

And then there is:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also. “

These are words that have sustained people through the ages and that continue to sustain us now. They are the bread of life—the nourishment we need to have and to share.

During our sacrament of communion we share the bread of life—for us, the symbolic body of Christ. By taking the bread of new life into our beings we promise that we will strive to become more like Jesus in all we say and think and do. We will try to set aside our petty complaints about one another, our hasty judgments and we will try to be patient and understanding, forgiving and loving. That is a lot to ask from a little cube of bread. But the physical bread is just a little reminder of the spiritual bread that has come to us and touched our souls through the continued presence of Jesus at our communion table. Let us share his life together that it becomes a part of us.

-- Amen