

The bread of life is a representation of God's love in the world. Bread is daily nourishing we need, both physically and spiritually, to truly live. We ask God for our daily bread in the Lord's prayer, acknowledging our need for food and other substance-things required to keep ourselves and our loved ones alive. We hear of Jesus providing miracles with bread, multiplying even the smallest, densest, most uninteresting loaves provided to him to truly fill and feed the thousands of people who flocked to him on a hill so long ago. These miracles give us hope and give us a taste of the power Jesus has to bring new life into our world. And now in our Gospel text today, we encounter Jesus as the bread of life. Jesus as the human and divine representation of God's love in our world. Jesus who indeed gives and sustains and nourishes life, here on earth and in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus, the bread of life from heaven, the love of God made human, the one who calls us and guides us and gives us hope, each and every day.

We, as followers of Christ, know this all to be life-saving truth, but the people around Jesus at this time of his proclamation, were not as on board with Jesus as the one who came from heaven to give us new and abundant and eternal life.

For example, the Jews that are referred to in this Gospel text are the religious leadership, the authorities in this time - the people who knew the scriptures well and had a significant level of power in the community. These aren't just the everyday kinds of folks that we often see Jesus ministering to - in this scene, Jesus is speaking directly to the leaders of the time who are complaining and questioning his authority and his ministry. These leaders know enough about the words of the prophets and the history of God's revelations throughout time to know that Jesus is touching on something significant, and they're both frustrated and confused, hence the complaining. They don't want their authority questioned, and here is a Jewish leader in their community, Jesus, saying that he comes from God, from his father in heaven, so they try to belittle him - "isn't this the son of Joseph and Mary who we've known for a long time? What is he saying, 'my father in heaven'? His father is Joseph, our carpenter neighbor who we've

known forever - why is he saying these things? Is he trying to stir something up?"

Of course, we know Jesus is speaking this deepest truth of who he is - the Son of God. The Savior of the World. The one who the prophets knew would come to bring new life and life-saving love to us all. But the leaders at the time either didn't know or didn't want to know that this was who Jesus truly was.

From the Christian lens, when we read the Old Testament, or what's also called the Hebrew Bible, we see that so much of it points towards Jesus Christ, his arrival in the world, his ministry, life, and death. And Jesus' embodiment of these promises, prophecies, and proclamations indeed changes and saves lives in every time and place.

When Jesus speaks about his body, his flesh being the bread of life, he leans on the promises given by God, in conjunction with his physical, human presence. This lays the foundation for how we understand the sacraments in our church tradition today - the two parts of a sacrament are the promise and the sign. The promise is God's promise, covenant, mysterious presence among and within us, and the sign is the physical element of the sacrament.

In our Gospel text today, the bread of life, Jesus himself, is directly connected to communion, when we partake in the bread and the wine as a remembrance of Jesus, his physical humanness as well as his divine love, given for us. The sign is the bread and wine, the promises are of Jesus, the new covenant in his blood, shed for us and for all people for the forgiveness of sins and the new life in his resurrection. Jesus is indeed the bread of life, new life, abundant life, eternal life, gracious and merciful and steadfast and love-centered life.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Our hunger for life is satiated by the bread of life, Jesus himself, and our thirst is quenched by the new covenant in Jesus' blood.

So how do we go about encountering this bread of life, this cup of salvation? Of course, in communion, we are reminded of these promises, and partaking in the sacrament, eating the bread and drinking the wine, joins us to faithful people worldwide, the body of Christ, across time and place, who also seek to fill themselves with this abundant life and love given to us by Christ Jesus.

But the body of Christ in our time now is both the following of our Lord and Savior, the Jesus we learn about and encounter in scripture, worship, prayer, and in the ways we show up for our fellow people, for humanity, just as Christ calls us to. The body of Christ is also the community of humanity, people working together to love one another and love God as we are called to. The body of Christ is the gathering of people who follow Jesus, who are committed to discipleship, of sharing the good news simply in who they are and how they act in the world. The body of Christ is the gathering of people to which we are always welcome, always have a place, and indeed must do everything we can to share that good news of love and grace and mercy and life with our fellow people.

The bread of life is a gift we give other people. Anything that connects us to the whole body of Christ in community, in relationship, is the bread of life. It's what Jesus desires for us, to be in loving relationship with Him, and with God His Father, who indeed created all of us and called us very good. The gifts of God are always premeditated and given by others. The bread of life is given to us by Jesus. Communion is presided over by a person, and served by other people. Relationships always require at least two people giving effort and receiving the connection you make. The gifts of God are for and served by the people of God.

We must do what we can to be the bread of life for others, to give these gifts of God, inside our church community and especially outside. As we go into our communities, into the different roles and places that we fill each day, we are received by others. And they too, as they encounter us, receive

Christ in the relationships we share. They experience the new life God has sent through Christ Jesus by our participation in the body of Christ and indeed in the ways we show the love of God to them, in our actions, thoughts, and words.

Sometimes we might feel like we fall short of being this body of Christ, fall short of sharing the abundant love and life we receive first from God. But Jesus does not expect or demand our perfection, He simply requires our presence. Our faith. Our belief in Him and the God who created us. Our best efforts. Our love for God and one another. Whoever believes will have eternal life.

Jesus is our bread of life, the one on whom we can rely for all our needs and nourishing, in our physical and spiritual lives. Jesus is God's love in the world, made human, who out of great love died and rose again to give us this life abundant. Whoever believes will have eternal life. And that bread of life, Jesus Christ, will truly fill, sustain, and guide us in our life, into great love, now and always. Thanks be to God, Amen.