

**“A Steady Diet”**  
**John 6: 35, 41-51**  
**Elder Jill Fandrich**

About a week ago, I baked a blueberry buckle, and I brought a plate into work to share and also a plate into church here for the staff. This prompted a weeklong conversation among the church staff about why it was called a buckle, a term that was apparently novel to a few here. Some research on the part of the church’s cracker jack staff revealed that coffee cakes of this kind are also called cobblers, betties, pandowdies, grunts, slumps and even sonkers. We conjectured about why a simple food like this would have so many different names. I might add as a side note that the girls at the court house where I work responded with a mere “thank you,” which either means that they are less linguistically curious or perhaps less easily distracted from their work. But in any event, we engaged in a lively discussion for several days here at church about the many different names for a simple quick bread.

Later the same week, I noticed that the bread section at Wegmans now carries “na’an,” a type of Indian flat bread. I brought some home and served it to my son. “What’s this?” he asked. “It’s na’an,” I said. “It looks like pita,” he said. “Well, it’s not,” I said. “It’s na’an. It’s Indian.” “Tastes like pita,” he said. The conversation went on this way for a while longer until it finally ended with him saying, “It doesn’t really matter what’s it’s called, does it? It’s good.” Come to think of it, I think that’s how the buckle conversation finally ended too.

So when I read this week’s lectionary reading about Jesus calling himself “the bread of life,” I was already in bread mode.

Today’s reading is actually the third reading in a row from John’s gospel that talks about bread. The readings began two weeks ago at the beginning of the sixth chapter of John with the story of the feeding of the 5000, then continued last week with verses similar to today’s, with Jesus calling himself “the bread of heaven.” In fact, the lectionary continues with two more readings the next two weeks on the theme of bread. That’s five in a row! I think this might be why Phil chose this week to go to Chautauqua. After 38 years in the ministry, he said this particular stretch of readings in Year B of the Lectionary Cycle can be very challenging. Really, how much can you say about bread?

A lot, apparently. The Bible talks about bread a lot. Think of all the Bible stories that include food, especially bread...

- God sending manna to the Hebrews in the wilderness to feed them on a daily basis.
- Jesus feeding Jarius’ daughter and Peter’s mother-in-law after they were healed,
- Jesus making a breakfast of bread and fish for the disciples on the shore,
- Jesus teaching us in the great prayer to “give us this day our daily bread”

- Sharing a meal with the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and finally recognized him when he broke bread,
- The description of the earliest followers of Christ in the first chapters of Acts, breaking bread together, and of course the most significant...
- Jesus sharing the Last Supper with the disciples and telling them to remember him when they break bread.

Despite all the times bread is mentioned in the Bible, there's nothing really special about bread. Bread is something we eat every day. Toast in the morning, sandwiches for lunch, rolls with dinner. Some say that when this passage from John is translated in Asian bibles, it has Jesus saying "I am the rice of life." Jesus chose to describe himself with one of the most mundane of images. Bread is a staple of our diets, but not the part we usually remember

That's the thing about the bread of life imagery that intrigues me. Of all the wondrous imagery of God that Jesus could have used to describe himself, he calls himself the bread of life. How could something so ordinary be so special?

I would submit to you that the ordinary things in life *are* the most special. John Lennon said "Life is what's happening while you're busy making other plans." The miracle of life is the miracle of day-to-day existence. One of my favorite books is "Gilead" by Marianne Robinson. It is beautifully written, thoughtful and poetic monologue of a preacher as he reflects on his daily existence. He describes watching his son play, eating his evening meals, watching the leaves change. When we discussed "Gilead" in our book group a while back, some didn't care for it, saying, "Nothing happens in it." I would say, "Everything happens in it." The preacher in "Gilead" would understand that things like daily bread *are* the miracle of life.

I remember a story, told as a sermon illustration many years ago by a previous pastor here, about a minister who was discouraged to learn that his parishioners were hard pressed to recall any of the sermons he had delivered over all the years he had served in their church. He lamented to his wife that he felt his work was useless if he had made such a little impression on the people he served. Fifty two sermons a year for so many years, and hardly anyone could specifically recall more than one or two. After allowing her husband to feel sorry for himself for a while, his wife asked him to describe in detail all the meals she had prepared and served him over the many years of their marriage. He was hard pressed to specifically remember more than a few. She said to him, "You don't remember the food I've prepared and served this family with love, and yet it has nourished you and sustained you day in and day out for all our lives." Then she added, "So it is with the work you do in the church. The love and care you put into delivering God's message, both in sermon and in deed, has nourished and sustained the people you serve, whether they can describe it or not."

I think that's what Jesus is getting at when he talks about being the bread of life. He is talking about God's daily presence in our existence, in all the mundane, ordinary, unremarkable "stuff" of our lives.

These "bread of life" references are especially pertinent in the context of communion, or sharing the sacrament of the last supper, which we did last Sunday. This summer, we have been celebrating the sacrament in a different way, by "intinction" rather than by passing the individual cups and the pre-cut pieces of bread. With "intinction," the congregation comes forward and breaks off a piece of bread from a common loaf and dips it in a common cup. It is a more communal, active way to share the elements of bread and juice, body and blood. I find it particularly moving. As I came forward last Sunday to share in the sacrament, I stood in that center aisle with my fellow worshipers, waiting to receive the elements. I looked at those around me. There were young and old, male and female, some in suits, some in shorts, some in jeans and t-shirts, people from all walks of life, some who were visiting this church for the first time and some who have walked these aisles for over 70 years. It was a powerful symbol of the body of Christ, as reflected in the living body of people in this church, sharing in the broken bread that has symbolized Jesus since he spoke those words in today's reading-- "the bread of life."

And if Jesus is the "bread of life," and we are his body in this day and age, what does that say about our role in nourishing and sustaining each other? The gospel tells us that Jesus was God incarnate, born as a simple baby, the son of a carpenter and a young girl. In today's reading, the people say, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" In other words, "Hey, this is just Mary and Joseph's kid!" Look around you today. The people sitting in these pews are nobody special. And yet they are the most important people in the world. We are God's children, the bread of each other's lives.

Author Ursula Leguin wrote, "Love does not just sit there, like a stone; it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new."

So every day, thank God for the meals that sustain us, the love that binds us together, and the miracle of our daily, ordinary existence that is evidence of God's presence among us, the bread of life. Amen.