

World Communion Sunday: One Body

October 10, 2021

Bendersville & Wenksville United Methodist Churches

Acts 2:42-47

Bread.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Bread is one of those things that is, on one hand, as basic as it gets, and on the other hand, is something that holds a very special place in a lot of our homes. Bread is one of those staples that can be found in just about every single household throughout the world. The look and the taste and the ingredients might differ, depending on what grows in that region and what is used as a leavening agent and what kinds of ovens are available and how much time the bakers have. The French croissant, for example, made with puff pastry dough – rolls of butter layered and folded and cut into the dough and then left to ferment in the fridge for 12 hours before baking – this tastes very different than the Jewish Matza bread – an unleavened bread that tastes kind of like a really big cracker, based on the story of the Passover when the Hebrew people had to get out of town quickly and so didn't have time to let the dough rise.

In some parts of the world, they steam their bread – you see this a lot in certain Asian countries like China and Japan. In other places, it is fried. Coming from New Mexico we had a significant Navajo population in the northern part of the state, and one of the most delicious things ever was Navajo Fried Bread that you could get at any number of different roadside stands. In some places, bread is baked in outdoor wood-fired ovens, and in other places it is cooked in a skillet over an open fire.

For most of us, we probably don't think all that hard about bread, most of the time. We may pick up a loaf or two at the grocery store when we are running low; we may grumble a little bit at the price tag; we probably have our favorite varieties. White bread, or wheat bread, or fancy whole-grain bread, or for those on special diets maybe gluten-free bread – in which case we will *really* be grumbling at the price tag. If I am going to make French Toast with my bread, I love to spring for a really yummy, slightly sweet and buttery Brioche. If I'm making garlic toast to go with a bowl of spaghetti, a long loaf of Italian bread is really yummy. And for a ham and cheese sandwich, a slice of whatever was on sale will do just fine, although I really love a good rye bread.

Breads can be basic, or they can be fancy. They can be really expensive or, especially if homemade, they can cost next to nothing with the most basic of ingredients. White bread isn't especially nutrient-dense, but some breads – if made with whole grains and eggs and unrefined sugars – pack a powerful nutrient punch, which is especially vital for

people in developing countries who may not have a whole lot else to eat. For a lot of people, bread is *the* thing that sustains life.

And so, it is no wonder that bread is referenced so often throughout scripture. It is something of everyday life that, no matter where in the world we live, what century or decade we live in, how old or young we are, we can all understand. From the story of the Hebrews making unleavened bread at Passover, to the story of God providing Manna (a curious bread-like substance) in the desert; to king David honoring the memory of his friend Jonathan by promising to always provide Jonathan's son bread from his table; to the prophet Ezekiel writing out a recipe for bread (containing wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt). To the New Testament – Jesus multiplying loaves and fishes; and, of course, the last supper when Jesus takes a loaf of bread, breaks it, and says “this is my body, broken for you. Whenever you eat of this bread, do it in remembrance of me.”

That's powerful stuff. Because, in reality, people were eating bread every single time they sat down at the table. Even if there was nothing else on the table, they ate bread. Whether it was baked, steamed, fried...leavened or unleavened...white, wheat, rye, or made with lentils and spelt...didn't matter. What mattered was that the everyday sustenance of life was to serve as a constant, everyday reminder of the God who enters into our lives, provides for even the most basic of our needs, shows us hospitality and grace, and unites us together as one body.

And so, in our scripture reading today, from the book of Acts, we see the brand-new, baby, fledgling church. The church has been alive now for a matter of a few...hours? Maybe days. It is on or around that first Pentecost, a couple months after Jesus has been raised from the dead. The Holy Spirit has just come upon all of the believers and made people speak and understand different languages, and in so doing has built bridges between people and cultures,

And then...their very first item of business? To meet together in their homes, and to break bread together. And this wasn't just sharing a meal together – although it was that too. This was an inviting of Christ to come and be present in their midst. To do exactly what Jesus had asked them to do – to remember Christ every time they gathered together and allowed food to enter their bodies. Every time they shared a meal together. Every time they broke bread – whether as a large community of faith or as a small family unit or as an individual person joined together in spirit with other individual persons. In the simple act of feeding their bodies – in the simple act of *living* – in the most basic of all basic things – they were inviting God to be there, active and alive in their midst, measuring and mixing and kneading and forming and shaping and molding them into one body in service to all the world.

And so today, on this World Communion Sunday, we join together at the table. And we break bread together. But this year, I would like for us to remember that we don't just come to the table to have an intimate moment, just me and Jesus. We don't just come

to the table with our brothers and sisters in this community of faith. As we come, we celebrate that we are joining together in spirit with all Christians across the globe. All of us children of God who eat bread of various sorts and varieties; all of us who share in life together, even though our lives may all look different, we come together with the first believers who ate together with glad and sincere hearts, allowing their hearts to be changed and transformed every single day – every time they ate. And in so doing – in this *daily* act of prayer and worship, the *whole world* was changed.

And so, as we come to the table, we bring a variety of different breads to our table:

Naan

A Middle-Eastern flatbread that can be used as the basis for so many things. It can be a pizza crust. You can use it as a vessel for other foods, or you can eat it on the side, by itself. It can be sweet, or savory; spicy, or plain. It is pretty much a perfect companion for just about anything.

Today as we observe this classic Middle Eastern staple we are mindful of all of those who live, work, and serve in the Middle East and in other war-torn areas. We pray for healing, for reconciliation, and for the kind of peace that only God can bring when our lives and relationships with fellow human beings are torn and fractured.

Black Russian Rye

A dense rye bread, similar to a pumpernickel, that gets its characteristic dark coloring from the addition of coffee and sometimes molasses to the dough, plus poppyseeds on top.

This bread doesn't look anything like our other breads. The color is totally different. The strong flavors of the rye and the coffee make for a delicious, yet wholly different experience. The Black Russian reminds us to pray for all of those who look and act differently from the rest of us. Whether it be through differences in skin color, cultural differences, or disabilities that set some people apart from others, we pray that we all might grow to appreciate the beauty of all God's children.

Challah

A braided loaf of kosher bread, enjoyed by our Jewish brothers and sisters as a traditional Sabbath and holiday bread. Traditionally, before the bread is baked, a portion of the dough is set aside as an offering to God.

Even though as a Christian community we believe very differently from the Jewish community, we owe much of our faith, our stories, and our traditions to them. And so today we remember all those people across the globe who may believe differently from us, but who God has still called us to love and serve.

Mt. Athos Fire Bread

This is a bread that originated on an island in Greece that makes up the home to more than 2,000 Eastern Orthodox monks.

Today we give thanks for all of those people, both in this country and in others, who have dedicated their lives in service to God. And we pray that just as these monks have found a place of peace, of simplicity, and of community, God would weave moments of peace, simplicity, and community into each one of our lives.

Pumpkin Bread with Pumpkin Seeds

Nothing says “Fall Harvest” like pumpkin. Filled with the rich smoothness of the squash and the sweet spiciness of the fall flavors, and topped with the delightful crunch of roasted pumpkin seeds, this bread is fall comfort food at its finest.

And so this harvest season we give thanks to God for all of those here in Adams County, and across the world, who’s life’s work is bringing food to our tables. Farmers. Pickers. Migrant workers. Truck drivers. Grocery store workers. Chefs and servers. All those who go about the often hard and holy work of feeding the hungry.

Pretzel Baguette

Soft pretzels have their roots in Germany, and made it here to the states in the 1700s when the Amish communities first began settling Pennsylvania. The very first pretzel bakery was established in 1861 in Lititz, PA.

Pretzels are chewy, they are salty, and they can be somewhat “tough.” And so as we look at this pretzel loaf we give thanks to God for the “salty ones” in our lives; the “tough” personalities. The people who God has put into our lives who maybe require just a little bit more “work” on our part. For we know that these people play a sacred role in our souls – helping us to develop the fruits of the spirit: love, and patience, and kindness, and self-control.

Rosemary Sourdough

Sourdough is a classic bread with a distinctive sour bite to it that comes from its leavening agent – a fermented dough filled with wild yeast and lactobacilli bacteria. You don’t just go out there and whip up a loaf of sourdough bread – you have to start with the starter, which has been cultivated over days, weeks, or even years. And this starter is very much alive – a single teaspoon contains as many as 50 million yeasts and 5 billion bacteria – none of which we can see with the naked eye, but all of which are crucial as we make the bread that we have come to know and love.

As we remember the sourdough loaf, we give thanks for our history. For the hours, the days, the years, the centuries that it has taken to bring us here today, and for the millions, the billions, of people whose names we will never know and whose stories we will never hear, yet who nevertheless made their mark in life and in so doing have raised us up as the people we are today.

Croissants

Croissants are a classic buttery, airy, flaky bread originating in France. Most of us are probably familiar with mass-produced croissants, but for serious French bakers croissants are serious business. They have to be made by hand, with only the finest ingredients. Butter, sourced from a particular farm in southwestern France, which the baker carefully washes in spring water before folding it into the dough. High protein flour, and only fresh milk – the fresher the better, but also chilled.

As we bring the croissant to our table, we are grateful for all those who lead us to see God's richness, God's decadence, God's extravagance. We are grateful for our God who leads us through this life toward an eternity of abundance – an eternity in which the great banquet feast of our will contain nothing but the best and the finest.

My friends, as we come to the table today: the communion table, the breakfast table, the dinner table; as we break bread together with those so much like us and those who are so much unlike us, may we join together knowing that Christ is here with us, joining us all together as one – one body with many members, together spreading God's love to the ends of the earth.