
Sharing and Breaking of Bread Together

A sermon by the Rev. Salmoon Bashir
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 16, Year B

Give us this day our daily bread, Bread of Heaven! Give us this day our daily bread for our souls and bodies.

Over the last couple of years, while talking and visiting you, breaking and sharing bread at your dinner tables I came to know that some of you have visited my wife's home country in the Caucasus, Georgia, or maybe you have heard about the wonderful people that have lived there for centuries. If not, I greatly encourage you to visit and learn about this ancient Christian country. And one of the first things you will learn about the people there is how deeply their hospitable and communal way of living is rooted in and shaped by the early Christian church. Sharing and breaking bread together! Today I want to bring to you a very simple, daily practice of the community that raised my wife. Mari used to spend all of her summers at her grandmother's, in a house where her mother grew up. And she told me about the weekly practice of bread-making that her grandmother and other women of the neighborhood would engage in. The 7-8 families living on their street would bake bread weekly in their outdoor clay ovens, but not all together, no. Each family had a designated day when they would bake bread for the whole week. For Mari's grandmother, it was Thursday. Too little to help in the process, she knew she had a big task after grandma was done with baking. She would have to deliver two freshly baked, warm loaves of bread wrapped in a newspaper, to each family in the neighborhood. Whatever was left at the end would not be enough to feed the family for the whole week. But this was no problem because every single day someone in the neighborhood was baking bread and delivering two loaves to their house. And so, every day every single family in the neighborhood had fresh bread. And this all happened so organically, without prior discussions or keeping check of who gave what. Whatever the need was, the community met it together, sharing the life-giving bread and sharing their lives with one another every day. Sharing and breaking of bread together! Sharing the sacred tradition of Manna with their neighbors so all can be fed with the fresh bread every day!

We've spent several weeks exploring chapter six of the gospel of John, where Jesus continually tries to reveal his true identity to the crowd, a group of over 5,000 people he had just fed. And now Teaching them in the synagogue, Jesus interprets the passage that he is the Bread of Life—the bread that has come down from heaven and is standing right before them!

Jesus is equating and drawing a powerful parallel between himself and the manna that sustained the Israelites in the wilderness. Just as manna was the bread from heaven that nourished the Israelites physically every day for 40 years when they were stranded in the wilderness, Jesus now declares that He is the true Bread of Life, sent from above. Manna was a divine gift, a daily provision from God that fully satisfied their physical needs of hunger but could not be stored for future use—each person received exactly what they needed for the day. Like two loaves of bread for all neighbors for their daily use. And now in this gospel, Jesus, the Bread of Life, offered himself to all of us, the eternal nourishment to our souls. Just as some of the Israelites grumbled about eating the same manna each day, the gospel story tells that many reacted with complaints and anger when Jesus revealed himself as the eternal Bread that came down from heaven.

However, the people misunderstood Jesus, expecting him to provide the same miraculous bread they had heard about in the stories of Exodus. They failed to recognize that the true manna, the eternal Bread of Life, was standing right in their midst. Their minds were fixed on the physical bread he had just provided, but they were rejecting the true Bread of Life. In John chapter six, we see Jesus miraculously feeding a crowd of five thousand, yet by the end of his teaching, most of them had left, angered by his words, leaving only a dozen disciples. The crowd dwindled from five thousand to just twelve. Even some of his followers struggled with his

message, finding it hard and difficult to accept.

Yet, even in the face of rejection, Jesus continued to reveal the profound truth of who he was. The true Bread of life which came down from heaven to be broken and shared among all of us.

Yet, even in the midst of confusion and doubt, there were some disciples who, though they didn't fully grasp the meaning of the Bread of Life or the eternal bread, still held on to their faith. Our brother Peter, once again speaking on behalf of the others, declared, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Despite not knowing the whole story, Peter's faith resonated with the very truth Jesus was trying to teach. Believing the power of truth without even knowing the whole story. He represents the faith and trust that Jesus sought to instill in them all. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" You are the Bread of Life! You are the giver of eternal life. Where else could we possibly turn? This declaration embodies the essence of what Jesus was teaching—the recognition that he is the source of life eternal. The true Bread of life which came down from heaven to be broken and shared among all of us.

Dear brothers and sisters, just like manna, believing that Jesus is the bread of life, we believe that there is always enough for everyone at the table every single day. My prayer today for all of us is that may we be praying and having faith every day by saying 'give us this day our daily bread' rather than worrying about tomorrow! Like for Peter, for us also this might be a difficult notion to grasp. And even though there might be thousands of questions and struggles in your own faith, beliefs that you don't fully understand now, what matters is that you engage in the practice of believing and having faith daily. After all, you can only believe what you don't fully know.

Relying on and receiving daily portion of bread like Georgian grandmothers, daily portion of manna, practicing daily portion of your faith, and of course asking for daily bread of life, which is set here, right here on this table. It is not always going to be perfect, but it is about continuing to believe, continuing to collect manna one day at a time. Two loaves of bread every day. One step of faith at a time!

Give us this day our daily bread, Bread of Heaven! Give us this day our daily bread for our souls and bodies. Amen!