

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Matthew A. Welsch Transcript**

“The Bread of Life”

“I am the bread of life.” “The body of Christ, the bread of heaven.” Time and again we encounter bread used as a metaphor for the incarnation, and in today’s sermon Father Matt reflects on the “miracle” that is bread making – and why “the bread of life discourse” is central in understanding who Jesus is. “Like a well-tended sourdough starter, God’s grace is indefinite. Or like baking bread in the midst of the trauma and uncertainty of the pandemic, Christ’s incarnation brings order out of chaos.” The readings are 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a; Psalm 51:1-13; Ephesians 4:1–16; and John 6:24-35.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of God, the one who created us, who liberates us, and is making us holy. Amen. Please be seated.

I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. If you think back to April of 2020, back to those early days of the pandemic, the early days of the shutdown, many of us started to bake as a quarantine pass time. A creative outlet that simultaneously provided some semblance of control amid uncertainty, while conveniently resulting in delicious baked goods to eat and share. The baking craze was so rampant on social media that it became impossible to find flour and yeast in the grocery store. Do you remember that? That is how I round up deciding to buy a comically large 50 pound bag of flour, and I also bought an equally comically large airtight dog food container to store it in. But during this period of confusion, and trauma and fear, many of us turned to baked goods. We turned to bread. The knockout star of this newly discovered national passion for baking was sourdough bread. In part, because sourdough is made with a homemade starter, rather than store-bought yeast. Not to brag but I was baking sourdough bread long before the pandemic made it cool. However, making sourdough is very simple. To start, you need a sourdough starter. A sourdough starter is essentially a living colony of yeast, a colony of bacteria, which I realize does not sound particularly appetizing but it is essential to achieving sourdough's characteristic tangy flavor, and light but chewy texture.

You can maintain a sourdough starter by taking a little bit of the starter that you already have going, taking some of it out, and then adding back in fresh flour and water. You can do this indefinitely. The part of the starter that you take out is the part that you use to make bread or pastries pancakes, you name it. Giving proper care, starters can last, and last. There are bakeries in France that had been using the same starter to bake bread for hundreds of years. My starter is only five years old. Her name is Brenda, Queen of Leaven. Thank you. Church humor is something else; isn't it? But baking sourdough bread is simple. It only requires four ingredients: Flour, water, salt, and yeast. First, you mix the flour and water together and then you let it sit. You add the salt and the yeast using some of our starter, you mix it, let it rest, fold it, let it rest, shape it into loaves, let it rest, you catching a theme? Then you bake it and eat it. Simple ingredients, and a simple method. However, bread baking is also messy. Maintaining a starter requires lots of flour, lots of mixing and discarding, and the old starter, if you get it on your

countertops, as my husband can attest, old starter hardens like plaster. It's deeply unpleasant. You wind up getting flour everywhere. What's more like many bread bakers, I prefer to mix my bread dough by hand.

In the early stages, this means that it is very sticky and wet but it's worth it. It's worth the mess because baking bread is also miraculous. You take these four simple ingredients, you make a big mess of your kitchen, and you transform them into beautiful, delicious, and nourishing bread. Nothing beats the smell of fresh baked bread or the sharp crackle of the crust when you bite into it for the first time or the feeling of sharing that bread with the people you love. Baking bread is simple, it's messy, and it is miraculous. Bread is intimate, and it is necessary for our survival. That is why bread is such a wonderful metaphor for the incarnation. I'm the bread of life, Jesus says. This week we begin a four week journey through a portion of the Gospel of John that is called the Bread of Life Discourse. This is to say that for the next several weeks, we'll be hearing a lot about bread from Jesus. In this section of the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches his disciples, teaches us, that he is the bread of heaven, the bread that is given for the life of the world. This teaching is central to our understanding of the Eucharist, to our understanding of who Jesus is, as he has revealed to us in the flesh, in word and in sacrament.

Remember that last week we heard that Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. The next day, some of the folks who witnessed that miracle who had their fill of the loaves, and no doubt a few other folks who had heard about it, they came looking for Jesus. They were hungry for more physically and spiritually. In this interaction with him that we hear today, Jesus reveals something important about who he is, about who God is, about what the incarnation is all about. I'm the bread of life. Jesus says, I am 23 times in the Gospel of John. This is one of those things that doesn't translate very well. We say I am all the time when talking about ourselves. But whenever you hear Jesus say, "I am," particularly in the Gospel of John, it's entirely likely that he's revealing something important. These 'I am' statements are moments where Jesus is pointing back, pointing back to God's interaction with Moses in the burning bush. When Moses asked God what God's name was, God replied, "I am, that I am. " In ancient Judaism, it was considered blasphemous to use God's name, "I am" in reference to yourself, and yet Jesus does it all the time. "I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the bread of life." In these moments, Jesus is revealing his divine nature. He's claiming God's name for himself.

At the same time, he's attaching himself, his expression of the Godhead to some kind of tangible image, a vine, a shepherd, or in today's case, bread. Jesus uses these mundane objects to point to deeper profound truth about God and God's relationship with us. What does bread have to tell us about the incarnation? As we've learned, bread making is simple and messy and miraculous, just like people. We are made of simple ingredients, carbon and nitrogen, the dust of the earth, we're messy. We make mistakes. We sin and fall short of the glory of God. We are miraculous. We are children of God, made in God's own image. In the incarnation, Jesus takes all of that, all of it into himself. God takes on human flesh, simple, messy, and miraculous in order to offer us the reckless abundance of God's grace. Like a well-tended starter, God's grace is indefinite. Or like baking bread in the midst of the trauma and uncertainty of this pandemic, Christ's incarnation brings order out of chaos, stability in the face of trauma. In the incarnation, God declares that matter, materiality, our bodies, are all sacred. God mixes heaven and Earth, humanity and divinity together in the person of Jesus Christ, and declares that all of creation broken and imperfect, is good and holy and worthy of redemption. What's more, in declaring himself the bread from heaven that gives life to the world, Jesus the incarnate one, declares that God cares about our physical needs too. Needs like food and water, as well as our spiritual ones like our yearning for the love of God.

In Jesus, God meets this yearning, fulfills that hunger, reminding us that God and God's grace are as close to us as the very breath that we breathe and the food that we eat. All of this is packed into a single simple statement, "I am the bread of life". Simple words that have the power to change the world and the power to change our lives if we let them. We have come together at this time and this place to gather around God's table, whether in person or remotely. In a few moments, we will say the prayers and we will give thanks for God's work in the world and in our lives. We will encounter the intangible grace of God through the tangible materiality of bread and wine. We will experience that grace and love ourselves and commit to sharing it a new with one another. We'll remind ourselves that we who have been baptized in water and in spirit, who are nourished at this table, we are the body of Christ, the extension of God's incarnation. When we receive communion, whether that is in church or online, we hear the familiar words, the body of Christ, the bread of heaven. We hear it over and over again, if you listen, the body of Christ, the bread of heaven. These words of course, declare that what we are about to receive is the blessed sacrament of Christ's body and blood, the spiritual food for God's people. But with these words in that moment, we also declare that we together are the body of Christ. That we together are the bread of heaven given for the life of the world, transformed by God's Holy Spirit. C. S. Lewis once wrote, "Next to the blessed sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses".

This is because just as God is present in this bread and this wine, God is also present in each and every one of us. You beloved child of God, you are worthy of grace and redemption. Jesus loves you. Simple and messy and miraculous you, in all your beautiful imperfection. God cares about your body, your physical well-being, and God is wildly, recklessly in love with you. If that's true for you, then it is true for every single person that we meet. As St. Paul says, "Live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." You are the body of Christ, the bread of heaven that gives life to the world'.