

Jesus, the Bread of Life

Sermon for Sunday, June 13, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 22:19-20; 13:20-21; John 6:35

This message was given in stages, throughout the worship service. I made bread dough from scratch, talking about the significance of the ingredients. Then we had fresh bread for communion at the end.

[Note: In case you're wondering, the fresh dough was not used for this service. At the same time this was happening, dough which had been prepared earlier was baking in a bread machine right in the sanctuary, so the aroma filled the room!]

Recipe for bread: [Note: it's always wise to try a recipe ahead of time]

whole wheat flour	3 cups
sugar	3 Tbsp
salt	1 tsp
yeast	1 Tbsp
milk (or soy milk, water)	1 cup – 1.5 cups
vegetable oil	3 Tbsp

Stir dry ingredients together in a large bowl.
In a separate container, stir liquid ingredients together.
Pour liquids into dry bowl. Stir together, scraping the bottom until no dry flour remains.
Place dough on floured surface.
Knead 2-3 minutes.
Lightly oil the large bowl.
Place dough back in bowl. Cover, and let rise 1 hour.
Knead dough again. Place in baking pan. Cover and let rise another hour.
Bake in 375° oven for 40 minutes.

Introduction

In our worship service today, we will have communion. Depending on your church background, you may know it as “the Lord’s Supper,” “Eucharist,” “the Mass,” or “Breaking bread.” If you’re new to church, you may not have a clue what I’m talking about. I’ll tell you about it.

The final meal which Jesus ate with his disciples is traditionally called “The Last Supper.” Here is part of what happened that evening.

Luke 22:19-20, New International Version:
He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Jesus said, “do this in remembrance of me.” That’s why we do this several times a year in our worship services. By re-enacting Jesus’ Last Supper, it helps us to remember him, and what he did for us.

In our tradition, we call this ceremony “communion.” “Communion” means “in union with” someone. We believe that Jesus is here with us.

Sing “I Believe in Jesus” and pray.

The bread has many ingredients

I’m going to make bread for us to eat for our communion service. I’m be looking for helpers to stir the ingredients, and knead the dough.

We mix together flour, sugar, salt and yeast. Then we add milk and oil. Then we stir it all together, and the result is dough.

Isn’t that interesting? Have you ever tasted flour by itself? It’s OK, but it’s not really tasty. Sugar by itself is fun to eat, but you would make yourself sick by eating just sugar. Salt is something we sprinkle on other foods; by itself it’s not nice at all. Yeast is just weird tasting. Milk is good; but like sugar, it’s not enough just by itself. Oil is like salt: we add it to things, but we don’t drink it by itself.

So we have all these individual parts. Each one is very different from all the others. Some of them are nice to eat, and others taste terrible. But when we put them all together in just the right way, the result is delicious bread.

Life is sometimes like that. Even church is like that. There will be people you like, and people you don’t like. You have to work together with all of them. And when you do, when each person is doing the work God has given them to do, the result is wonderful.

After the bread is cooked, there is no way to separate the ingredients again. They are bonded together.

The main ingredient is flour. Flour is made by grinding wheat seeds into powder. You can make flour out of any kind of seed – oats, corn and so on – but wheat is different from all other flours. Wheat flour contains *gluten*. When gluten gets wet, it becomes elastic, like this elastic band. It can stretch. Just like you can blow bubbles with bubble gum, you can make air bubbles in dough made with wheat flour.

That’s what we do when we knead the dough. By the way, “knead” is spelled k-n-e-a-d. It sounds the same as, “I need money,” but it means folding the dough over and over. Each time I fold the dough, air is getting trapped

inside the dough. I'm also stretching the gluten, making it more elastic. You could say I'm exercising it.

Yeast is an amazing ingredient in bread. It is a living organism, and it reproduces by the millions. It eats the sugar in the mixture, and it breathes out carbon dioxide. Along with the air trapped by the kneading, this carbon dioxide make the bubbles which make bread light. After about an hour, this hard, dense dough will be soft and spongy.

Luke 13:20-21, New International Version:

He asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

You can think of this in two ways:

- Jesus is Lord in every part of our lives, not just the "religious" part. Jesus is Lord over our money, our time, our recreation, our work, everything.
- We are like yeast in our community. Our relationships with our neighbours, our co-workers, our friends and family are based on our relationship with Jesus.

Another vital ingredient in the making of bread is one we can't see: time. It takes time to do the kneading. It's not enough to just give the dough a quick stir. It takes time for the yeast to do its work. There is no such thing as instant bread.

Do you remember the story of Moses? How God spoke to him from a burning bush, and appointed him to be the leader of Israel? And for the next 40 years, you know where Moses was? Walking through the desert, leading a pack of complaining and fearful people who kept on wishing they were back in Egypt as slaves. It took 40 years for God to develop Moses to be a great leader, and to develop the people into a nation.

There is no such thing as instant spiritual growth. When God works in our lives, God is obviously not in a big rush. We may pray for something to happen, and want results immediately. But it seems that God does not work like that. A dandelion can go from a seed to a fully developed plant in just a few weeks. An oak tree takes 40 to 100 years to reach maturity. It seems that God wants us to be more like oak trees than dandelions.

I'll set this dough aside for now, and we'll come back to it later.

Sing, pray, prepare ourselves for communion

Jesus, the Bread of Life

On one occasion, Jesus miraculously provided food for a huge crowd of people. The result was that the next day Jesus had an ever bigger crowd of people following him. But they were not disciples, eager to follow his teaching. They just wanted more free food. As long as Jesus kept on filling their stomachs, they would stay close to him.

They got it half right. Jesus is a source of food which will never run out. But he gives food for the soul, not for the stomach.

John 6:35, New Revised Standard Version:

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

It is Jesus himself who is the food. He doesn't offer a commodity which can be bought and sold. He offers us himself. He offers us life. He offers us something which is priceless, which none of us could ever afford buy. But the gift he offers is freely available to all, whether rich or poor. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Jesus is saying, "Believe in me. Come to me."

Jesus, that is what we do here at your table. Amen.

Theme for today: Breathe in the aroma of fresh bread. Savour the tang of grape juice. That makes it sound like a restaurant review. Jesus' last supper with his disciples was nothing like that. It was a special meal, alright, but it wasn't the food that made it special. It was his presence and his message.

Those are the things that make the Lord's Supper still special today. Jesus is here with us. His words still speak powerfully to our lives. Let us follow him wherever that may take us.