

John 6:24-35

Aug. 1, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ok – so I’m going to give you a list of ingredients. Let’s see if you can guess what it is.

Unbleached wheat flour, water, high fructose corn syrup, oat hull fiber, yeast, soybean and/or canola oil, wheat gluten, salt, natural sour flavor (bacterial culture), soy flour, cultured wheat starch solids, vinegar, and soy lecithin

What is it? What do you think it is?

It is - Wonder Bread

That bread really is a wonder, isn’t it? The wonder of “modern technology.” A wonder that people ate it as much as they did and that we still do.

A bunch of the ingredients listed are of course necessary for the industrial process and to keep the bread “fresh” on the shelves, but when you compare it to home-made bread you can see that it has a lot of stuff that’s beyond the basics of what bread is.

When I make bread from scratch it is only yeast, water, sugar, salt, and flour – 5 ingredients compared to 13.

I checked the “good” bread that I just bought at King Soopers and I saw that it has the same ingredients as Wonder Bread. It’s just baked in a different form and the packaging makes you think that it’s higher class than Wonder Bread, but it’s not. It’s all the same.

Isn’t it interesting how our bread standards have changed over the years? My great-grandmothers always baked their own bread, but aside from the sour dough craze during the pandemic, I don’t know of anyone who bakes their own bread anymore. Maybe it’s time to break those bread machines out of the attic.

But, in the name of convenience and shelf life, we’ve accepted that store bought bread is bread, even if it’s not as healthy for us as simple old fashioned bread.

And if we go all the way back to Jesus' time, the bread was even more simple, just barley and water for the most part. I have a feeling most of us would have a hard time swallowing it today.

And that makes me wonder, especially as a Lutheran, a member of the reforming movement of the Church, how much of Christianity has been changed in the name of convenience and in order to make it easier to swallow.

What do you think? It's something to ponder anyway.

Especially when we consider that today's Gospel is paired with Exodus 16 and the manna in the wilderness. When God gives the people bread for their journey, they can't even recognize it. They have no idea what it is. Manna actually means, "What is it?!" And Moses has to tell them that it is food for the journey, a gift from God. For lack of other words, it's bread. Eat it. There is plenty to go around.

Now, there is a lot of speculation about what manna is, but the only thing we really need to know is that it is a gift from God and that it is food for the journey.

When people looked at Jesus, they asked the same kind of question – not *manna*, what is it, but *mei-na*, who is this? Jesus goes on to talk about manna and then declares that he is the bread of life. He is the gift from God that has come down and he is the one who gives sustenance for the journey.

In Jesus' day, bread was the primary meal. Veggies were infrequent and meat was even less frequent. Bread was the staple. That's what the people ate all the time at every meal. If you didn't have bread, you would pretty much die.

Jesus is the bread of life. With him we will never die.

And as a physical reminder of that, we share in Holy Communion today. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, we remember that Jesus Christ is the bread of life, the bread for our journey, the gift of God for the people of God. A gift that is given for our well-being. It's not a sign or a symbol. It's for real.

God gives to us because God loves us, not because God has anything to prove. God gives us what we need before we even know to ask for it. So, even before the crowd asks for a sign, Jesus has already filled them to the gills with bread.

Everything we need comes from God. Everything that surrounds us is a gift of God's love and faithfulness.

So as we go out into the world, we can ask, "Manna?" "What is it?" And answer the question with – "This is a gift from God." No matter what it is – it's a gift for life. Perhaps we're receiving it before we even need it.

When we come to the point where we can see everything as a gift from God, we will never be hungry and we will never be thirsty, because we will always know the truth that God is with us always – eternally – always providing for all of our needs.

Mary Mrozowski, one of the leaders of the contemplative prayer movement, wrote the following prayer for the morning:

Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today, because I know it's for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval, and pleasure.

I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person, or myself.

I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within. Amen.

<read again>

This prayer is that dry barley bread of Jesus' day – simple barley and water – a bread that we would find kind of hard to swallow today.

I mean how many of us welcome all of the unwanted stuff that comes into our lives? How many of us are willing to give up control? How many of us don't seek the approval of others?

Jesus Christ is the bread of life and he is the one who nourishes us for the journey so that we can take all of the crap that comes our way – even wearing masks again.

He is the one who reminds us that God is ultimately in control. His approval is the only thing that matters, and we already know that he loves us unconditionally because while we were yet sinners he died for us.

God comes to us first. God always comes first. Before we even know what to ask for, God gives it to us. Jesus is the manna from heaven. Who is he? He is God's love for us personified. It's just that simple. There really isn't much to it.

So, when conditions are placed on God's love in any way shape or form, we know that additives have been added to our Christianity, because the bread of life is not that complex. It's actually very simple – God loves us – all of us.

Human beings are the ones who make things complicated. Jesus is the one who is constantly removing all of the additives we try to put into our bread of life.

Christianity is really simple. Just believe Jesus. Just trust God. Stop making it so complicated.

Welcome everything that comes your way and give thanks in all circumstances.

Would the God who loves you to death and back really want any harm to come your way? Really? No – of course not.

Jesus Christ died for you out of pure love and out of pure love he was resurrected from the dead to show you that nothing is stronger than God's love for you.

Nothing.

So don't make it more complicated than it really is. I know that might be hard to swallow, but that's the truth.

The good thing about the wafers we have for Communion right now is that they are made of only flour and water. There is nothing else in it at all. It's that simple.

Jesus Christ is the bread of life. He is the life giving bread given to us for the journey. And, when we eat that bread, the wafer, at communion, we become one with him. So that, when we leave these doors, we are his body in the world. We are God's love personified.

God's love is given before we even ask for it. How might you live that simple truth in the world today?

God is love. It's not complicated.

Thanks be to God. Amen.