

SUNDAY, March 9, 2025 Lent 1 "Bread of Life"

Psalms 91 and 108 VU On Eagles' wings John 6:1-14 and 25-40

How many of you like bread? Really good homemade sour dough bread? Or maybe you like another kind that is heavy, dense and goes great with peanut butter or whatever centre you like in sandwich? Bread in all of its forms is a staple in the diet of people around the world. When we think of bread we need to reflect on how important it is as food for everyone. Canada is a large producer of wheat and not only is this for domestic use but it is exported around the world. Various grains are ground into a variety of flours and the flour is mixed with yeast, water and salt. These simple ingredients are mixed and kneaded, prepared and baked. Bread is an essential item for consumption and enables us to be nurtured and our hunger is taken away at least for a short while.

We have heard many stories of people who sacrificed their freedom by stealing bread for their families because they knew that one loaf would feed them for more than one day. In Biblical history under Moses' leadership, the Israelites fled and wandered in the desert to the Promised Land. During this time God provided not only water, but quail for protein and manna. Manna was a sweet, flaky bread that rained down from the sky every day (except on the Sabbath) for four decades as the people travelled through the desert. It was bread from heaven for them to consume each day. That is until such time they entered the Promised Land. Once the Israelites learned how, they moved into and cultivated their own land to produce crops in order to have food. Manna was God's gift to the people to keep them nourished along their journey because they needed food to keep going.

We too need good nourishment to keep going! And as we begin this season of Lent the journey of 40 days (not counting Sundays) has begun. Our focus this year will be on "Bread of Life" and what is necessary for us to sustain and enable and reach out to others and grow in hope and faith. Throughout these coming weeks our focus will be on this 'bread of life' as we understand growing in faith, what is needed each day, how we share with others and what it means to be in community. This season of Lent leads us to the time when we will remember Jesus' triumphal entry into the Jerusalem on Palm Sunday only to see him crucified a few days later. But it is because of Jesus' crucifixion that we have hope. Because there is life beyond the tomb- and this is message of Easter!

So let us look at what this season of Lent might mean to us as we consider Jesus as the Bread of Life! In this passage from John 6, Jesus has just fed over 5000 people with 5 barley

loaves and 2 fish with leftovers of 12 baskets. The people had been listening to Jesus and were filled both spiritually and mentally as they were given thoughts and ideas and ways of living. But they grew physically hungry. And so Jesus fed them- by dividing this bread and fish amongst them all until all were full. The crowd was amazed by him and they believed him to be the prophet of God. But they were just now sure of Jesus' purpose or what to do with his teachings.

From time to time, Jesus withdrew from the crowds and this was one such time. It wasn't until the next day when the crowds tracked him down. Jesus commented to them saying that since they received a free lunch yesterday they were looking for him again. But then he told them that food that perishes is not what they were to work for, but just like us they and we are to work for food that gives eternal life. They then asked, 'what they must do to do to works of God- he replied-'believe in him whom God sent.' He reminded them of the story of Moses when the people received manna from heaven and that it was God who provided it. And it is this bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then instead of dwelling on that experience of bread Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Bread that satisfies all one's needs? Isn't that what we each need at this time? For many of us we are searching for something beyond ourselves. Something that God supernaturally provides for us. It is a gift and miraculous indication that God is indeed at work in our lives. But we must take the first steps -believe in Jesus whom God sent. How do we understand who Jesus is? What did he do that was so amazing? And why should we love him and follow him?

These questions call us to commit ourselves to the process of spiritual growth. It means taking the 3 pillars of lent: prayer giving and fasting; and reviewing our lives to discover ways to follow Jesus more closely.

1) Prayer, grounds us in our relationship with God. Maybe we need to take notice of God in the ordinary activities—kids laughing, fresh laundry, the sunset or listening to the birds singing or squirrels running about. Maybe we need to begin the day by thanking God for a new opportunity to do something amazing for God. Lent also can be a time of expanding our regular prayer routines to experience God's love in new places and spaces.

2) Almsgiving or giving may include more than financial donations. Just what you give to others-are very important kind words, gentle, compassionate looks and the patient hearing with a listening ear. When we do this, we encounter the living Christ and our hearts are forever changed.

3) Fasting. For some Christians, small meals are encouraged during Lent and a larger one with no snacks in between. Many abstain from eating meat on Fridays. Other people make Lenten promises which give up some type of food or beverage for the 40 days-- ie coffee/ chocolate/sweets. But what if our fasting focused on behavioral choices? We could fast from negative self-talk, anger, second guessing others asking questions of doubt or even scrolling through social media.

These choices are yours to make as we share in this Lenten walk knowing that the One who walks with you walked His way to the cross for you. And each time you are offered time to seek conversion, a change of mind, heart and spirit you draw closer to Jesus. You have constant access to Jesus, the bread of life, who will sustain support and guide you. All you need to do is believe and receive his blessings. You are called to respond and grow in faith. God will bless you and lead you to becoming Christ's disciples filled with faith and hope. As you do walk this Lenten journey you will be nourished by the Word of life. Jesus he is the Bread of Life. Broken for us all. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

May God be with you as you walk this Lenten journey with hope and faith. May the bread of life in Christ sustain you always. Amen.