

A sermon preached at Zion, North Branford

August 12, 2018

Text: John 6:35, 41-51

The Rev. Lucy D. LaRocca

I heard some interesting news this summer- it wasn't covered very widely- Maybe you heard it as I did on National Public Radio; that an archaeo-botanist at a dig in Jordan found a 14,000-year-old piece of bread. Now, old bread crumbs might not seem to be big news- except perhaps in that they survived so long. But no one knew that bread was being made so long ago. It was previously thought to have become a staple of the human diet just 10,000 years ago. This discovery -of what looked like 'crumbs from a common toaster' has now changed how scientists think about the lives of our predecessors.

Ordinary bread is something we mostly take for granted; and yet it was once a new discovery. That one could grind up grains with other ingredients and bake the dough on the hearth of the evening's fire - was an idea both revolutionary and delicious. The resulting loaf could be kept without spoiling and was easily carried. It gave nourishment, joy and was truly a life changing discovery. Archeologists now believe that it was the discovery of bread that caused human beings to forgo their nomadic ways and start cultivating crops. Who would have thought that something so ordinary could change the course of human existence?

There are many references to bread in the bible-Early references reveal that bread was considered to be a special food to offer to visitors. Sarah made bread for Abraham to serve to their angelic guests.

And then there was the bread from heaven, the manna with which God fed our spiritual ancestors during their 40-year time of trial in the wilderness. Each day, the people would gather the flaky substance, which covered the ground like a frost. This gift of sustenance from God kept them alive; but If they tried to save some of this odd bread, it would be rotten by the next morning. It was to be their daily bread. God's people needed to learn that they were not in control of their lives, they needed to rely upon God for their lives; for their strength, and their nurture, one day at a time.

And in the incident which preceded this morning's Gospel, one which is recorded in all four gospels, Jesus gave bread to more than 5,000 hungry people. Afterwards, when Jesus and his disciples talked about feeding the crowds-he related that experience to the feeding of God's people in the wilderness with the manna. 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." And he made an even more startling claim, one that would anger authorities, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." And... "the bread that I give is my body."

Appearing so common as to be easily overlooked. So ordinary and yet capable of transforming human existence. These words can describe both bread, and Jesus. Again and again in his life; Jesus chose the ordinary and the common. He chose to take on a human body, to become a common person, and yet Jesus is so much more for us- God incarnate, God with us. Jesus gave

his whole life to save humanity, to show again and again with his actions and his ultimate sacrifice that he would give himself away for the sake of others.

Each week we gather around this table to receive the nourishment that Jesus offers. We feed on God's word and share a common meal that is so much more; the bread of life- Christ's own body- blessed and broken and given for us- that we might never hunger or thirst but have eternal life. We receive the life of Christ in us, to be strengthened for the work that God gives us to do. And this work that God gives us to do, this redeemed life, is not just a spiritual proposition. Our relationship with God is meant to be worked out –not just in our thoughts or feelings but in our very bodies and in our everyday lives.

God our Creator has never despised the ordinary or the common place; but has employed these means to carry out the plan of salvation. God uses lowly things to be for us so much more, even sacraments; those outward and visible signs of God's inward and spiritual grace. Throughout human history; God has used -and continues to use- the common stuff of life– water, bread, wine, oil and ordinary people – even the vulnerable, the weak and broken – regular folks like those we encounter every day, and yes, even the ones we see in the mirror- to be vehicles of God's radical, life changing grace, mercy, and justice.

The ordinary and the common can still change everything. Not by trying harder, not by our own strength, but by our dependence on the daily power of God to nurture and sustain us.

Come and be fed by Christ, the bread which came down from heaven. Come and eat, bread for the world.