



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Fed by True Bread

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

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French toast. Sandwiches made to order by Grandma. Or sandwiches cut on the diagonal to make triangle shaped pieces. Cinnamon toast and Parker House dinner rolls. Being fairly convinced that rye and pumpernickel bread were developed specifically to ruin my enjoyment of a meal. These are a couple of things that Peter and I discovered as we sat and considered what our earliest memories of bread were. We were pretty sure that we were of the Wonder Bread generation. But Peter moved to Lebanon as a child and then his experience of bread expanded to things like pita and lavash with exotic spices. I remained faithful to my PB&J on white bread. The first time I made bread it was white bread! And then in the late 70s the Great Harvest Bread Co. opened up in my neighborhood in Indianapolis. Honey whole wheat bread opened my eyes to the poverty of my bread experience. This was all dense, nutty, slightly sweet bread. It made the neighborhood smell great. I wanted to open a franchise myself. Bread had become something more.

Give us this day our daily bread. How many times had I prayed that before having a clue what it meant? I had never had to pray for daily bread. My meals were just put in front of me and I ate. I never stopped to consider how important bread is. It is a staple in every culture. Whether it's a baguette, nan from India, cornbread from the south, or Scottish oatie cakes, grain mixed with a little water and oil is usually at the center of every meal. It is the stuff that fills you up and gives you strength to do what you have to do. The stories of bread lines from war-time rationing in Europe and during the Depression tell the truth of bread. People die without it. One of the many famines in Israel's history brought the Hebrews to Egypt in search of grain for their bread. Their need for bread eventually led them slavery.

It is in the book of Exodus that bread begins its crucial role in the people's story. The night of the Passover is remembered with unleavened bread so as to recall the haste in which the meal was prepared. There was no time for the dough to rise, for they had to be ready to leave.

Once in the desert, the prospect of hunger and perhaps starvation, made the escaped slaves yearn for the security of their former captivity. They turned on Moses for having led them into the barren desert. But apparently it was all a part of God's plan. If indeed these

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

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people were going to be the beginning a new relationship with God for humanity, some ground rules had to be established. The very first one was to recognize that God is the source of everything and trusting that God will provide all that is needed, was their first lesson. Bread would be used to teach them to trust. Bread would become the symbol of providence and God's abundant presence.

The people were told that the bread would be there every morning and that they should gather only as much as they needed for the day. Those who worried about having enough and took extra discovered that by the next day it had rotted and turned putrid. The lesson to take only what you need was lived out every day. It was an exercise in trust. So when we pray "give us this day..." what we are actually saying is "help us to trust that we will have all that we need." Imagine if that lesson had lasted beyond the 40 years in the desert.

When Moses gave the instructions to the people about constructing the great Meeting Tent with its sanctuary there were instructions for special bread to be baked and kept in front of the presence of God. Twelve loaves of the bread of the presence were prepared every week. This bread reminded them of the divine generosity and served as an offering from the people. This tradition went with them to the promised land.

And then there is the baby, born in a barn in a town known as the house of bread, Bet Lechem, Bethlehem. Jesus is the gift from the house of bread, he is the gift of bread to those who hunger to know God and he is the bread that creates the community gathered at the table.

Bread is more than a loaf or a cake. It becomes a symbol for food itself. So when Jesus spars with the Tempter in the wilderness, and he is challenged to assuage his hunger by turning stones into bread, Jesus tells his opponent that we don't live by bread alone. What he is really saying is that to be fully alive, we need more than food. Attending to the needs of the body is one portion of life but if that is all we do, then we are not truly living the life for which we were created. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied."

So what is your bread? What nourishes you and gives meaning to your life? What is the food that endures rather than perishes? The reason that I have given myself so completely to Branford Cares this summer is because that work feeds me. Knowing that I am a part of creating something new and powerfully good satisfies me like the aroma of honey whole wheat coming out of the oven. When I pursue this bread, the abundance that I find makes me practically giddy. It has given me the chance to see children's eyes opened to the joy of helping others. I have witnessed the soul deep satisfaction on people's faces when their plans succeed beyond their expectations. Seeing people moved by the story of the little boy who wouldn't get his turn for dinner until tomorrow has sustained me all summer. And trust me, this bread is eternal because it will just keep coming every day.

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I'm taking a watercolor class and I have discovered that it doesn't matter if I'm any good at it or not – simply surrendering to the creative process is fulfilling. I have begun to see God's beautiful world so differently now as I wonder how the colors might be mixed to achieve the perfect hue. Sitting and playing with paints feeds me with calm and peace.

Peter and I are hosting an exchange student from Paris and it is wonderful. Hela is gobbling up vocabulary and idioms with such delight that it makes us laugh. We have received the gift of a new friendship which is never just bread, that's a cinnamon roll!

The food that is eternal, the bread of heaven is love. We find it in our closest bonds, in the people we love, the animals that share our lives. We find love in the bonds of community, church and town and country. The bread that is love rains down from heaven like manna in the wilderness and makes us one. It is God's purest gift to us, seek it, savor it, trust that it will be there tomorrow and share it.

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