**Bread from Heaven.** The people of Galilee recall the manna in the wilderness, which God gave their ancestors as bread from heaven. But Jesus says to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven” (vv. 31-32).

Bread from heaven. Food that endures. Food that never spoils. True bread. Makes your mouth water. The people are still confused, however, so Jesus continues: “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Such bread doesn’t just taste delicious, it also gives life to the world. The people say to Jesus, with excitement, “Sir, give us this bread always” (vv. 33-34).

Who would not want this kind of bread? Most of us love and appreciate the various breads available from cultures around the world. A slice of sourdough or a handmade tortilla. A hearty German rye bread or a crusty French boule. Seed-crusted, Turkish simit or buttery Israeli Challah. William Rubel, a bread historian, says that bread turns staple grains such as wheat, rye, or corn into durable foods. Bread is a basic food that can feed an army or nourish a hungry child. We know that bread is good, deep down in our gut.

But Jesus is not talking about something made of wheat, rye, or corn. “I am the bread of life,” he tells them. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry” (v. 35). Jesus presents himself as the most basic, durable, and nutritious form of bread available to us. “I am food,” Jesus seems to be saying. “Take me into yourself and you will never be hungry or thirsty or hopeless or powerless. I am the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to anyone in the world — including you.”

When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” he is saying to us, “I am the food that brings you forgiveness and new life, the food that brings you to health in body, mind, and spirit.” Jesus truly is “the food that endures for eternal life” (John 6: 27), the true bread from heaven which “gives life to the world” (vv. 32-33). All we need to do is eat this amazing bread, in faith and thanksgiving.

**A Recipe for the Bread of Life.** But at the same time, Jesus also wants us to know that *we*are food. When we eat the bread of life, we are nourished as the community which is the body of Christ in the world today. The bread that Christ offers us is not designed primarily to feed us as individuals; it is meant to sustain an entire community. “Because there is one bread,” said the apostle Paul, “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). We are food: The body of Christ, the bread of life. Like Jesus, our challenge is to be good bread for a hungry world.

So, what is the recipe for this very special bread? The first ingredient is *faith*. When the crowd approached Jesus in Capernaum, they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you *believe* in him whom [God] has sent” (John 6:28-29). Many Christians make a distinction between faith and works, but Jesus made clear that the two should never be separated. You do not praise God on Sunday and then cheat a client on Monday. You do not pray to Jesus in a small group and then fail to serve Jesus when he comes to you in the form of a hungry child. The *work* of God is that you *believe* in me, said Jesus, the one “whom [God] has sent” (John 6:29). Faith and works are as essential to Christian life as flour and water are to a loaf of bread.

The next ingredient is *adaptability*. Bread is found in cultures around the world, ranging from the bolani bread of Afghanistan to the malawach of Yemen. Nourishing bread can be found anywhere, but it comes in a wide variety of forms. If we are going to be bread for a hungry world, we need to be adaptable as well. Adaptability means taking worship beyond the walls of the church through live-streaming services. Adaptability includes gathering for theological discussions in brew pubs, park, and restaurants. Adaptability requires meeting people where they are, chatting in laundromats and in grocery store lines, and finding out what they want and need. The best ministry adaptations may still be out there, waiting for us to discover.

The final ingredients are *durability* and *nutrition*. Like a hardtack biscuit taken on a long hike, we need to have the guts to walk into challenging situations, on the far side of our familiar places and comfortable routines. We provide real nourishment when we feed the hungry, *and* wesit down with them for conversation over the meal. We advance the ministry of Jesus when we donate to missions, *and* we go to developing countries to build friendships through short-term mission trips. We effect real change in our community when we read about racial injustice, *and* we join with our brothers and sisters of color in achieving systemic change.

We transform the world when we hear Jesus’ words, *and* obey we them: “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise” (Luke 3:11). Or, as James puts it: “if one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:17).

True belief in Jesus requires acting as the body of Christ in the world, being adaptable, durable, and nutritious, always looking for ways to nourish a hungry world. When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” he is saying that he certainly wants to feed us, but he also desires that we be good food for others.

Jesus’ message resonates with us on this Communion Sunday as we gather at the table to receive the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. We remember how Jesus broke bread with his disciples and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24). Jesus asks us to continue to break bread and eat it together, believing that it is the body of Christ and the bread of life. We are nourished as Christ’s disciples when we receive this spiritual food, strengthened, and equipped to be food for a hungry world.

Prayer: God of Healing and Transformation, we hunger and thirst for your abundant life. We bring you our sorrow and ask for the bread of joy; we bring you our despair and ask for the bread of hope; we bring you our weariness and ask for the bread of inspiration. Meet us here. We need the bread of heaven to sustain us as we journey, that we may we be one with you in transforming the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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**We Are Food**

Sunday, August 1, 2021 John 6:24-35

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Gut feelings. Gut instincts. Gut responses. Gut issues. We take our gut seriously, don’t we? When a story is gut-wrenching, we find it to be extremely unpleasant or upsetting. When a person spills his guts, he is speaking truthfully and sharing everything. When we say, “She has a lot of guts,” we are describing a person with courage, conviction, and resolve. We know when something is important, deep down in our guts. Guts matter.

A crowd of people are anxious to find Jesus after he performs the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. So, they get into boats and travel across the Sea of Galilee to the town of Capernaum. They see him there and Jesus senses what they are up to. “Very truly, I tell you,” Jesus says, “you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (John 6:24-26). The people are motivated not by what they saw, but by what they ate. When it comes to Jesus, they follow their stomach, they trust their gut.

Scientists argue that the stomach is like a second brain because it often drives our decision-making. But Diego Bohórquez, an assistant professor of medicine at the Duke School of Medicine, argues that the gut comes first. “Very simple organisms do not have a brain,” he points out. “But they have a gut.” Throughout history, creatures had to eat to live. Science alleges that organisms ate for around a billion years before they learned to breath. First, they ate, then they breathed, then they began to think and talk.

“We eat three times a day,” Bohórquez says to *Duke Magazine*. “This is modulating who we are.” Put junk in your mouth, and you are going to look bad and feel worse. Eat good food, and you are on the road to health and fitness. Not that this is new information for any of us. As far back as 1923, an ad in the *Bridgeport Telegraph*said, “Ninety percent of the diseases known to man are caused by cheap foodstuffs. You are what you eat.”

Bohórquez knows this to be true. “At the core of who we are,” he says, “we are food.” Jesus would agree. “Do not work for the food that perishes,” he warns the crowd, “but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (v. 27).