

May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, fill you with holy bread through my words today and feed your hunger for love, grace, and forgiveness. Amen.

I remember learning how to bake dilly rolls with my mom when I was just a little girl. We LOVED dilly rolls. They were a staple at any family gathering because they're savory and pair with any hearty meal. After setting us up to bake, mom, taking my finger and placing it under the faucet, made me adjust the water temperature just right (warm but not too hot) to fully activate the yeast. Then the yeast was added to the sugar, butter, eggs, fresh dill weed, flour, and cottage cheese and suddenly we'd have dough to knead. We'd form it into a huge ball, place it in a greased bowl, and set it aside in a warm place to rise. Then came my favorite part! A while later I got to punch down the double-sized ball of dough, releasing its trapped, yummy dough-smelling air! We'd then rip off a bunch of pieces from the batch, shape them, and align them side-by-side in a pan. Into the oven they went, and voilà!, fresh rolls ready to be broken, buttered, and boisterously consumed a while later!

In the e-blast last week, I asked if anyone had any buttery bread-making memories to share for aiding in my sermon. Lana was the only one that responded, and here's what she had to say: Baking bread: there is something so satisfying about using your hands to mix, knead and then form the dough into different shapes. I watched my mother bake bread as a child and as a young married adult began making bread since I was spoiled by the wonderful taste and texture. I have been baking bread for over 50 years and it is still a pleasure. I bake flat bread that we use for communion and even though it doesn't have the same taste or texture it still fulfills the "knead" for bringing enjoyment to myself and others.

It surely does bring us joy, Lana. Definitely a step up from those styrofoam tasting wafers! We are grateful for her gift of bread, aren't we, Church?! The taste and the smell of bread, the joy of learning a skill, the connection we share when we break bread together. There's nothing better. I preached a sermon about this a couple of weeks ago. I talked about my time in Argentina and the link between breaking bread and the act of seeing Christ as he really is in new contexts among new friends. The connections we can make with strangers over food and bread were and are miraculous.

We actually have lots of miraculous bread stories in Scripture, too. The story of God feeding the Israelites manna, the six different stories of Jesus feeding people who just a little bread and some fish, the Last Supper. And so it makes sense to us that Jesus would describe himself as the Bread of Life. Like bread, Christ imparts joy and meaningful hope into our lives with his Gospel of good news, which, at its core, is the story of God's love for us. God in Christ gives us sustenance through this message of love and subsequently, so much more to chew on than if we were to live a life without God. God blesses us with the same good qualities bread does.

But, as any good bread recipe can attest, there's more to bread than just the making and consumption of it. It's the special ingredient that makes bread do that special thing bread does. What's that? Well, rise up, of course!! (That is, unless it's flat bread). But

it's the yeast in bread that I want to talk about today. I want to liken us to the yeast that can make the Bread of Life, Christ our God, ferment, persist, and rise up and out into our communities and world.

What do we know about yeast? Well, yeast is a leavening agent that has been used since antiquity to ferment drinks and bake breads. Yeast is composed of single-celled microorganisms, meaning yeast is alive! Yeast converts sugars into carbon dioxide and ethanol. Yeast feeds off of and converts the sweet, often fragrant ingredients in a mixture into byproducts that make bubbles, overwhelming and expanding the composition of whatever mixture it's in. Pretty cool, huh?

Well how does yeast compare to us and our ability to rise up or uplift the love of God?

It's the sugar, people! It's the love. And I'm not saying that to be mushy. I mean, who likes to talk about anything mushy when it comes to bread? What I am saying is, at the end of the day, for God, love wins! One of my favorite verses, Romans 8:38-39, states, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." So by consuming God's sweetness (I mean, really internalizing what is the full scope of God's love) we're able to convert whatever mixture we're a part of into something more expansive, something more spacious, something that can taste and feel so good, we can't help but share it with others.

I have a friend who grew up in a different faith tradition. She can't seem to step foot in a church today because her tradition intimidated her into thinking God doesn't and wouldn't love her if she didn't believe in or obey every single rule, every religious code, every word of Scripture. We had a wonderful conversation the other day about God's sweetness, God's sugar or good news. God's love was demonstrated in the ways Jesus always questioned the Pharisees and the Sadducees of his time for the ways they toned down God's gospel due to their legalistic tendencies and judgmental overtones. Jesus did this so people like my friend could find their place within God's fold. If you'll notice, Jesus was always clashing with these religious officials, putting them in their place by saying, "You're not as cool as you think you are, tone it down a notch."

Jesus demonstrated disregard and got downright infuriated by hypocritical religious leaders whose outdated prescriptions for piety had no place in the world anymore. He was hung on a cross because of this view and the ways he demonstrated defiance. Yes, he died for our sins according to God's will, but this explanation of why Jesus died on a cross is only half the story. The cross was used as a common form of torture in Jesus' day. Throughout Roman occupation, people were hung on crosses on the outskirts and hillsides of cities as an intimidation tactic to keep people in line. Jesus stood as a symbol of what happens to people who defy any kind of institutional power that is not of God and the unconditional, healing love God has for us.

The thing about Jesus though, is he did not stay dead. He turned the political staging of his death into a defiant demonstration of God's power and God's preferences for love, welcome, and acceptance for all into God's holy assembly. Because of his demonstration on the cross, God in Christ then asks us to look at his life, consume his sweetness, and emulate it for the entire world to scarf up and take in. Like the carbon dioxide produced when yeast eats sugar, we are to rise up and bubble out, turning the world into one gigantic bread bowl. Can you imagine how delicious life would be if we all chose love over hate, understanding over injury or insult, and relationship over disconnection?

But what does bubbling up and out look like? Jesus shows us the way. Jesus talked to people he wasn't supposed to talk to. He healed those classified as untouchable, scandalous, lawless, sinful, and wild. Who in our society is classified by such terms? Just think about that for a second. Think of the religious authorities of our day, who choose piety over embrace and judgement over welcome. Thinking they have more power than what's been given, who do they say is in or out or deserving of God's love or not? Whoever is in the "not" category--these are the people we should befriend while demonstrating God's sweetness, God's sugar, or the kind of love that can and will become the bread of life for their weary souls that have felt cast aside and rejected by God's church for far too long.

We are the yeast in the Bread of Life that is Christ. God in Christ is the judge. God in Christ is the Savior. We are neither of these things. Our only job, my friends, is to go out into the world consuming God's sugar so God's gospel can grow all the bigger, making our world a much better, more accepting place to live and be for all, as God intended.

That's it, my friends. That's all. So as you go out from here, remember this is the one and only time you're going to get the go-ahead to eat sugar and the Bread of Life because it's good for you. Please, don't take what I'm saying too literally or you'll surely get diabetes and that's the opposite of what I'm trying to pronounce this morning!

May we go forth in the name of Christ, who is our life-sustaining bread. Amen.