

*Sermon for Christ Church, August 2, 2009; 9 Pentecost, Year B  
John 6:24-35; "I am the Bread of Life" by Rev. John Perry*

Jesus talks about the bread, which gives life to the world. I don't know about you, but I often feel I am in great need of bread like this. I'd be right up there at the head of the line, saying with them, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Bread which gives life. I remember, when my children were young, we used to bake our own bread. Nothing, so fills a house, with delicious, life-giving aroma, as homemade, freshly-baked bread. A feast for the senses.

You add some warm water and sugar to the yeast, and let it proof for a bit. Add some honey, other things to make it richer, more nutritious; and then you stir in the flour, a cup at a time. When it stiffens up, you turn it out onto a floured board; and let it sit for a bit.

Then whichever of my children was two or three, would climb up onto a stool alongside me. We'd dust our hands with flour, and dive in. Work the dough, knead it, fold it, turn it. Feel the pleasure of the warm, living dough, taking shape in our hands. We'd get flour on our clothes, our faces; I remember my daughter, leaning into the dough, pounding on it, giggling, her happy smile set off by flour-whitened cheeks.

Then it was time for a rest; for the dough, and for her. The dough would rest under a towel, she under a blanket, perhaps after she and I read a story together.

Later, whichever child was five or six, coming home from school, would get to punch down the risen dough in its bowl. I remember my son, hauling back for a good one, punching hard, a sharp yeasty tang erupting from under his fist. We'd shape the loaves together, weighing them out, rolling them up, then into the bread pans. Then, for the loaves, it would be time to rest again; and for my son and I, time for telling of the day in school.

Long before the oven was ever turned on, there would already be, so much that was nourishing, so much that was life-giving, in those loaves.

When they had risen, we'd set them in the oven to bake, so they would be done, just after my wife got home from work. And the house would slowly fill, with that heavenly aroma. She would come home, to our embrace and to that aroma; it was a happy time. We'd all pull up to the table. Out would come the golden loaves; one of them, we would lay on its side on the cutting-board, in the table's center. The first cut, delicious steam emerging. Butter, melting on the warm slices. The family, together, nourished and nurtured; content. Nothing ever tasted so good. This bread, gave life. To us all.

Jesus said, 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the other.' But I do not regret working for those loaves that perished . . . and I can tell you they perished rather quickly, at that table. Rather, I think both are needed: the perishable; and, that which endures.

Perhaps I'll use the one, a symbol for the other. Sort of like, a sacrament. Perhaps I'll remember, how much one nourished, to remind me, how much I need the other. How much it, too -- how much, *he*, also -- will nourish. "I am the Bread of Life," Jesus said. Bread; is such a fitting metaphor.

Because I get very hungry, some days. Regardless of Jesus saying, that whoever comes to him, will never be so. Things that are discouraging, happen. Things I hoped would get done, don't. Opportunities for ministry, seem to get thwarted. I remind myself it is my vocation, as a Christian, to take risks, for the sake of the Kingdom. Something that is a risk, by definition, will not always pan out. Things, go awry. Things done, in the name of Christ's love, get misunderstood, or seemingly come to naught. Life's like that. Ministry, is like that.

What goes awry, in *your* life? What leaves you, hungry? Because things *do*.

These things I've been speaking of; life's discouragements. He who calls himself the Bread of Life -- he knew discouragements, aplenty. And yet, he had faith. Faith, in the long view; faith in what *God* would yet accomplish -- not, faith in himself. Faith, that gave him a way to *be in*, that which he lived for: God's kingdom. Faith, that allowed *being in* this kingdom, by how he lived, to bring its own satisfaction, it's own fulfillment. He would leave the rest, to God.

Maybe it's kind of like, the work, of making that bread. Just making it, brought immense satisfaction; nourishment. Long before, that oven went on, and the loaves went in. Maybe this is my metaphor.

The doing of, ministry that is of the kingdom, ministry which testifies to the truth and reality of that kingdom. Is like working the dough. Which, I remember, had smiles breaking out, from a face dusted with flour, from the labor. Labor, complete with its own nourishment, its own satisfactions, its own fulfillment.

*This*, is the bread of life. Jesus, who calls himself this bread, must have known that, because he surely fed on it himself.

So it is *not about* gathering around the table, the whole family, the work all completed, with the golden fragrant loaf there before us. That's for later. For now, we get a foretaste. In what we call the Eucharist. He, who knew discouragement, gives us himself, the Bread of Life.

To say: Take from this, from me, your fulfillment. Know that every act you do, that testifies to the Kingdom. Every act of forgiveness. Every act of generosity. Every act of justice. Every act of compassion. Every act of shared burdens. Every act of hope. Every act of understanding. Every act, as Paul says, of *building up* each other, of *building up* the whole body of Christ, in love. Every such act. Gives life to the world. It's like kneading that dough. In each of these, he who is the Bread of Life, is present; it is he, who is working.

Be nourished by this. And never go hungry. Amen.