

I speak to you in the name of Our Creator, and Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter. Amen.

Today's gospel reading taken from John, chapter six, verses 41 to 51 centres on the theme of bread.

You know what bread is? I brought a loaf of fresh baked bread with me this morning and shortly I will cut into it. Bread is a substance which has been called the staff of life, made from flour, and water, with salt, sugar, and of course yeast which is added to make the bread rise. Bread is a food which many of us enjoy unless your body cannot tolerate the gluten contained in its structure. For me, there is nothing to compare with fresh baked bread, right out of the oven, still warm and smelling heavenly. I love the aroma of it. I love the texture of fresh bread being sliced. And I particularly love the taste of fresh bread.

But there is another aspect of bread which can not be overlooked. Bread has nutritional value. Bread plays a role in helping us to sustain our physical well-being. As I said a moment ago, bread has been called a staple of life. Bread nourishes us and provides many of the nutrients we need to remain healthy. Bread provides fibre to our diet. Fibre keeps our digestive system healthy and helps control our blood sugars and cholesterol. In bread, we also have some protein, protein which helps our bodies to renew, to repair and to grow new cells. Bread also provides calcium which is needed everyday for the maintenance and rebuilding of our bones. And then, then there is iron. Iron is one element found in bread. Iron is needed for our mental acuity, for energy for our bodies to function, for healthy blood, and to strengthen our immune systems.

For most people, bread is a source of nourishment and a pleasure to enjoy, often with others. Yet we tend to set aside bread's nutritional value when we are eating it.

For over two thousand years, ever since Jesus shared our human experience and taught us about God's love for all creation, by showing us the path to the kingdom of heaven, Christians have gathered in communities, in homes, in churches, in outdoor spaces, in places of conflict, disasters, times of sadness,

times of joy and times of celebration. We have gathered to seek nourishment from God's hand. Though we are many and varied in our expressions of faith, across many denominations and traditions, as Christians, we are united by faith in the sacraments of baptism and the breaking of bread.

In this passage from John's gospel which shared with us, Jesus says that He is the bread of life. But what does that mean for us, as we journey forward in our relationship with Jesus? Well, let's take a minute and look at what it means to be nourished with the bread we share in the eucharist, and what it means to be nourished with the spiritual bread of heaven – in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

Nourishment is a word which is used a lot in our church circles. We are nourished by reading the words of Holy Scripture. We are nourished in prayer, in communication with our Creator, and in the sharing of the bread at eucharist. But it does not stop there. When we gather as God's people for coffee hour after the liturgy, or at pot-luck dinners, or parish celebrations, we share in the gift of being community. Yet, our community also includes those in need, beyond our parish family – the homeless, the hungry, and sometimes those who just need a kind word or a shoulder to cry upon. And then there are those in our parish family needing our support.

The gift of caring for others is not limited to the physical needs of others. We can not separate the physical needs of any of God's children from those things which are not easily seen and touched. It is our Christian responsibility to care for the whole of God's people, no matter who they are, or where they come from, or what they may believe is their relationship with the Creator. That means we care for everyone, no matter what they believe or don't believe.

In verse 44 of the sixth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus said this, "No one comes to me unless drawn by God the Creator, the one who sent me (me being Jesus, himself). We do not come to know Jesus through our own desire, through insight we have gained through study of the Scriptures, or through our own thought processes. We are each individually brought into relationship with Jesus Christ by the hand of God. God invites us into relationship with Jesus

because of God's great love for all creation. God's gift of grace is the catalyst which makes our relationship with Jesus to blossom and to grow.

The invitation to come into this relationship is a gift from God. How we respond to His invitation is our choice, and ours alone. Many will choose to accept the Creator's gift and begin to journey in faith with Jesus. Others may choose to go it alone without God in their lives. This is the choice we have. It is our free will to accept or reject God's call for us to be children. I know which one I have chosen in my own life, do you?

Every time we gather to share the words of scripture and to take part in the breaking of bread, we reach out to our Risen Saviour. Jesus meets us in this sacrament and once again claims us as his own. In the sharing of bread, blessed, broken, and shared, we are fed with the essence of the bread of eternal life. We are fed with the life-giving grace of God.

Our relationship with Jesus and with God, our Creator, is renewed, strengthened, and deepened through the sharing of this bread we share together in the eucharist. Through prayer, hearing the word of God, and through the sharing of the elements of bread and wine, we remember how Jesus asked us to remember him, our relationship with the Creator grows. Our participation in the daily life of our Christian communities is the path through which we are nourished. We are nourished and fed by the grace of God so we can become empowered to share the Good News of God's gift of love with all creation. When we are not nourished, not filled with all God has offered us, we hunger, we thirst, we, whither and may lose sight of life eternal.

God has promised that whoever hears the call to be a child of the Most High, and then accepts that invitation, will be blessed with the gift of grace. Grace, which through faith, will lead to life eternal in the presence of the One who created us. As our Lutheran brethren say, "Salvation by grace alone through faith alone." But that is the topic for another sermon, and not today's.

Our mission is to spread the good news about God's love and the gift of eternal life for all believers. Our nourishment for this work comes through God's gift of

His beloved Son – the bread of eternal life. What a wonderful promise for all who accept God's call to be children of the one who gave us life.

Amen.