

Pentecost 12 B

1 Kings 19:4-8

Psalms 34:1-8

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ. Amen.

Did you ever learn something about someone that was a complete surprise?

I remember when we first came to Holy Spirit there was a Halloween dance that fall. People were coming in costumes, there were great snacks, Tarcy was here as our DJ. It was a lot of fun. But there also was a buzz going around Holy Spirit about the new pastor and her tattoos!

What no one asked about or saw when I was interviewed was my full sleeve tattoo, but at the Halloween dance people were taking notice saying things like, "we never knew!" "did council know she has a tattoo?" and it started a little buzz in the church – which all came to an end when people realized it was only a "dollar store" fabric sleeve and not real at all! Probably some of you were relieved and some disappointed!

"Surprise!" Jesus says, "I am the bread of life!" What an odd way to describe yourself! If we wanted to impress someone we'd be more likely to boast about a degree, or that we're really good at basketball, hockey, dancing, writing, climbing mountains, fast at running, the best at _____. Jesus however, uses this everyday image because in his time it was a very meaningful symbol.

Bread was God's gift to the Israelite people when they were escaping slavery in Egypt. If you remember this story, they first made bread for themselves and when that ran out, God provided "manna" every morning for them. The Israelite people learned that when they came to the end of their own abilities, God was right there alongside them.

Jesus calls himself "the bread of life," that was a dramatic claim to make. Just before saying this, he had fed the equivalent to a huge

soccer stadium of people, and then he had quieted a sea that threatened to take down a boat with his disciples. People were pretty impressed, but now he claims to be bread. No one had done that before; in a way what he was actually saying is, "I am God." That's why some people got upset.

God wasn't supposed to be the guy down the street. God wasn't a son of the neighbour. God wasn't a carpenter. No, God was mighty, creating light and darkness, fending off Egyptian armies, leaping tall buildings in a single bound...

Yet, here was Jesus. God in the flesh. God in the neighbourhood. Like a full sleeve tattoo on the new pastor, it didn't quite compute. But God wasn't trying to impress anyone.

God is trying to build relationships. God is working on trust, trying to redirect us when we get off track, love us when we come to the end of our rope. God makes herself available in storms, in hunger, in blood, sweat and tears. God is there when we are overcome by our mistakes and don't know where to place our next step. God is at the hospital bedside, at the dinner table, in your locker and lunchroom. Being "bread" is about being on the journey with us, whether it's from Egypt to the Promised Land or from childhood to old age.

Bread is the meaningful symbol the church still uses. We break bread here to remind us that Christ is here. We don't even try to put on a spectacular show on Sundays with smoke and mirrors to impress people, instead we eat together, pray together, sing together. We also take on hard work together: speaking out for justice, collecting useful items for those without, opening our building as we partner with others like Al-anon and AA, we stock a pantry for the hungry, we've welcomed refugees and stuffed backpacks for youth. In these everyday ways we live out the bread within us, the Christ within us.

Who isn't hungry for bread like this? It's pretty safe to say that people hunger for community, a place of belonging, a place to feel safe, meet friends, contribute of themselves. If we were to use "church" language we would say they are hungry for *bread*, hungry for God. Yet, the church is a foreign place for many; incredibly

within a generation the church has moved from being central in the community to the sidelines. (There's a lot of reasons for that which we don't need to get into this morning.)

Perhaps they don't expect to find the Holy One in the building they drive past on their way to work, or in the person who is on the train with them. So... could we surprize them? Could we find new ways to help people see and experience something different than they expect?

For example, earlier this week we were given free tickets to the Edmonton Zoo. A church group partnered with a real estate company to provide 4000 free tickets, on an incredibly hot day this church group was handing out cold water bottles, the real estate team gave bags of tasty popcorn. There was no hard sell, no bibles handed out, no sermon to listen to, no offering collected. A free evening at the Zoo – and the families were streaming in! I hope they saw a surprising side of the church that day, a living breathing community of caring people just like themselves.

I think when we learn to explore and experiment and try new ways to be bread for the world we will realize tremendous spiritual growth. We will learn about God with those we meet and we will learn more about ourselves.

God isn't in a box or a church or even at the zoo, but God is always ready to surprize us.

Amen.