

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 6:51-58
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 August 19, 2012

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

My **Auntie Dorothy** baked the best **rye bread** ever! When I was little, she and Uncle Al would come and visit only once in a while. They lived a long way's away. But when they did come to visit, they always brought lots of **love** for us **and** Auntie Dorothy's **rye bread**. She is the aunt who always said that I was going to grow up to be a pastor. She said, "**Darrell started talking the moment he was born and he hasn't stopped since. He must be going to be a pastor.**" I guess that she was right.

Auntie Dorothy is long since dead and gone on to be with God in heaven. But, when I attended a big church meeting a couple of years ago, I accidentally sat next to a lady who said that she was from Finland, Minnesota. When I heard that, I said, "**My Auntie Dorothy and Uncle Al Ostman were from Finland. Did you know them?**" "**Yes,**" she said, "**I was their next door neighbor.**" We talked a little more and then I said, "**My Auntie Dorothy always used to bring loaves of the best rye bread when she came to visit us.**" The lady from Finland said, "**I have her rye bread recipe!**" And, when she got home from the church meeting, she sent Auntie Dorothy's **rye bread recipe** to me. Now I have that **recipe**.

Recipes are the directions that tell us what ingredients to use, how to put together and bake them in order to make wonderful things like sweet rye bread. They say stuff like, "**Mix in a little of this. Add a pinch of that. Use a tablespoon of the other. Bake it in the oven and then eat it!**" As you may guess, I don't know anything about baking wonderful bread. My Auntie Dorothy did. **I have her recipe, but I haven't baked any bread.**

Jesus knows how to make good bread. Today we hear that Jesus has the recipe for making wonderful lives for all of us. Do you have Jesus' recipe at your house? My aunt's recipe is just sitting in a drawer at my house and not helping anybody – no good bread to enjoy. Well, Jesus is not like that. He won't just sit in a drawer. Jesus is out walking with us and giving us the best bread ever, every day. Jesus gives us himself – bread and love forever. Here is the **recipe for you and your family. Let Jesus be a part of everything that you do and your life will be the best it can be every day here on earth, and with God in heaven forever.** Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

“**WELCOME**” was written all over the place! On the first Sunday that my wife and I came to visit you folks back in January, we stopped for lunch at a little restaurant along the way home. Signs of “welcome” could be seen from the posters in the windows to the shouted “**Hello!**” from the waitress who stood clear across the café as we entered the door. Once inside, we experienced sincere concern that the **buffet**, a few minutes past closing time, would not be “**fresh enough**” for us to enjoy. When we said that it looked good to us, the waitress asked the owner who held firm. The waitress came back. “**We can serve you some other food that is just as good,**” she said. From there on out the waitress was closely attentive to our needs and continued to visit with us whenever she passed by. Finally at the end of our meal, we thanked and complimented her for the great food and service. She then introduced us to the owner. While we visited with the owner, the waitress darted off and returned with a copy of **The Lake Country Journal** magazine which had done a feature story on their café.

That waitress was proud of the place where she worked. What we saw, heard and experienced in that place was:

- We have something good to share with you.
- We’re glad that you’re here.
- We care about how you are doing.
- We hope that you’ll come here often.

Jennifer and I both were struck by how wonderful it would be if our Christian congregations received their guests in such a wonderful fashion. If restaurant owners and workers can be that excited about sharing ordinary bread, **how excited can God’s people be about sharing the Bread of Life with a hungry world!** And how much better still, to know that it is **our loving and faithful God who shares both** ordinary bread and the Bread of Life **with us and through us** right here and now in Aitkin, Minnesota!

This morning isn’t about being “**religious.**” It is not about “**going to church.**” This morning is about all of us **sharing the very Bread which gives us life,** deep, rich and abundant here and now and forever. **Now that is good Bread.**

In our Gospel text from **John 6:51-58**, Jesus says, “**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh... But the one who eats this bread will live forever.**” “**Eat**” Jesus’ body and “**drink**” his blood? Jesus’ first century Jewish listeners would have revolted at his words. Jews were not cannibals – eat flesh! Jews by Levitical law could not consume blood! Jesus fell under attack from his opponents and even some of his followers turned away and left him. His challengers had spoken of “**manna**” – the bread that rained down from heaven to feed God’s people when they wandered between slavery and Promised Land. Jesus fed a huge crowd with **loaves and fishes**. Now he speaks of a feeding which **exceeds even these amazing miracles**. Jesus first fed them the kind of bread that could keep their **bodies alive**. Now Jesus was going to feed them with the kind of bread which would give their **hearts, minds and souls true life**. Where does your bread come from? Do you have the **true life** that Jesus alone can give?

In the days when Jesus walked the land, bread was everything. Without bread, you died. No bread, no life.

God gave bread **once** in **Israel’s wilderness time** – **but really always**. God gave bread **once on a cross** – **but really always**. God gave bread **once at a table with bread and wine**, but bigger than that – **really always in Jesus**:

- Here at **this table** in the sanctuary of First Lutheran Church,
- At the table where you will enjoy your **next meal at home**,
- And at the table **where all of God’s people will gather forever** in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I conducted the funeral for a good friend and parishioner the day before our going away party at Lord of Life Lutheran in Baxter. **Jeff Kozitza** died at age 49 following a short battle against cancer. Jeff was a **husband, father, mechanic and carpenter**. He had served as a **small group confirmation mentor** and a one-on-one mentor for maybe fifteen years or more. He always had the wildest, most rowdy boys assigned to his group. Jeff, **rough and tumble hunter, fisherman and recovering alcoholic** shared some of the most **profound faith insights** with our Friday morning Men’s Breakfast Group. Before Jeff died, he wrote this letter to be read at his funeral. I think that it says something about the **Bread of Life**.

“THOUGHTS SHARED BY JEFF KOZITZA”

Amen. Now why would I start with a word that you normally would use at the end of a thought, a prayer, a job well done, or even a job you're glad to finish? Amen!! We say Amen when we are ready to turn it over to God. We did our best and now it is in God's hands. We could say it's the start of a new beginning. Today is the start of a new beginning for all of us.

All kinds of thoughts have been going through my mind. Happy, sad, glad, sorrow, excited, scared... Well, picture this!! Here I am sitting at the right hand of our Father. I do my normal and say something stupid. He's just going to reach back and clip me one on the back of my head. I'm really going to have to watch what I say. Before when I would do something wrong, all I would do is say a prayer saying I was sorry. Say Amen and start all over again.

Remember this is the start of a new beginning. I just want to say thank you to each and every one who is here today. I want to say thanks to my Family, Friends, and neighbors. You will never know how much you have helped me on my journey. I love you all.

I thought that when you die you would cross the finish line on your journey. I'm rethinking that thought because I don't believe, or I hope that I don't cross that finish line. That would mean that it would be over for me. I would not grow in my faith. I would not be able to help my Family, Friends and neighbors. Like I said before, all of you have helped me on my journey of faith. I may not be able to physically help you, but I hope that I can help you spiritually. My Family, Friends and neighbors have taught me – Love, Faith, Joy, Prayer, Hope, Courage, Strength...

This brings me back to Amen. When we say Amen, we are turning our lives, thoughts, hopes and dreams over to God. As I leave this world, leave behind all of you, who are so precious to me, I want to trust myself and all of you safely into God's care. Amen.

I am so thankful for the life that I have lived together with all of you in this world. But it is hard to think of letting go of you when I leave here to be with God. Heaven will be wonderful for me, but I don't want to leave you behind, alone. So, I am clinging to this promise; God has a place saved for me at his heavenly banquet table and I believe that whenever you receive Holy Communion at the Lord's Table here on earth, we will be dining together with Jesus. When you go up for communion, listen carefully to the promise, "This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin." Then say Amen. Eating together at the Lord's Table will always keep us together in God's love and care –

Amen. Then on the last day, we'll all have a seat at that heavenly banquet together.

I'm not coming to the Finish Line. I'm coming to the Starting Line for a joyful eternity with God and all those I love. Amen. Remember what you taught me – love, faith, joy, prayer, hope, courage, strength... These will help you in life both spiritually and physically. In the meantime, I'll meet you at the Lord's Table, now and forever. Thanks be to God. Amen."

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It sounds to me like Jeff met the Bread of Life. It sounds like he was filled with the Bread of Life. I believe that Jeff was carried every day here and then home at the last, by the Bread of Life. I don't understand it. I doubt that anyone truly does. But, Jesus said, "**This is my body given for you.**" And Jesus said, "**This is my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.**"

Jesus said, "**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.**" I'm not sure exactly how it all happens, but Jesus says that he is the Bread of Life. I believe it. Jeff believed it. Do you believe it?

Jennifer and I tasted a wonderful meal and wonderful hospitality at a nearby restaurant. Someone once said, "**Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.**" Bread is being served here today. That happens all the time. I'm pretty excited about that. Have you seen any signs of welcome or hospitality? I saw one. It said, "**This is my body given for you.**" Jesus put out that welcome sign. You can't do any better than that! Thanks be to the Bread of Life. Thanks be to God. Amen.