

August 9, 2015 11th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

1 Kings 19:4-8, Psalm 34:1-8
Ephesians 4:25—5:2, John 6:35, 41-51
“Bread for the Journey”

Grace and peace to you, beloved of God, from the one who was, and who is, and who is to come, Jesus Christ, our bread. Amen.

It is so very good to be with you this morning...finally!

Thank you for the warm welcome,

for your prayers in the transition times (keep praying—there’s still a lot of transitioning for all of us),
and for your leadership and support of the Hope community through the years, through the call process,
through the thank yous and goodbyes for Pastor Shirley, the summer weeks, and into God’s future.

I ran into Craig recently and we laughed because he’d caught me holding this slender, “bible” of sorts, (we call it the “congregational pictorial directory”☺).

I was trying to put your names and your faces together.

He said, “You know, there were a few times I asked the congregation to wear name tags.”

I have no intention of making this the new thing, but for a few weeks, I’d be grateful, it just helps.

And, if you’ve been here for 6 months or 48 years and you just happen to glance at someone’s name tag to confirm their name... I won’t tell a soul☺, and I’ll simply give thanks that the body of Christ is stronger!

On my name tag I write Pastor Jen or Jen, though in good company I’ll answer to many names and titles.

Our girls, 6 year old Eliza and 22 month old Alice, are here today and will be here every other week.

They get to call me Momma.

Our whole family, Jane, the girls, and I: we are grateful for your welcome and look forward to getting to know you—each of you—over the coming months and years.

We turn to our readings and to bread. Bread for the journey.

I brought a loaf along—I needed this physical reminder.

Every three years our lectionary cycle assigns five weeks of bread texts during July and August.

You’ve guessed it: today we are smack in the middle of these readings from the John’s 6th chapter

To everyone’s amazement, Jesus has multiplied the loaves and fed the hungry crowd, and today the religious leaders are still trying to sort out how Jesus can say, “I am the bread of life.”

The Psalmist sings, “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.”

I want to knead some bread dough and smell it baking; then to taste and see, I’d add feel and smell...

In 1st Kings, the angel of the Lord guides a tired and desperate prophet Elijah,

“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you,” the angels says.

At his head, Elijah finds a cake of bread baked on the hot stones; near it is a jar of water.

I confess that I get to this time of year in our readings and I yearn to call together our closest friends with some good wine and crusty bread dipped in olive oil.

I call it the wine and bread party, and it's as much the physical eating and drinking as this spiritual need to be together, to talk and laugh and cry, to be bread for one another.

I love the book, Sleeping With Bread; it has roots in Victor Frankl's stories from the Holocaust years.

Children who'd lost every thing, and every body—they were cared for during the war by others.

When they'd have trouble falling asleep, they were given a crust of bread, to hold.

They'd hold that bread like my kids hold their lovey or blankie, clutching the bread, for it was a reminder, very tangible, that they'd eaten today and they'd eat again tomorrow.

In that book, Sleeping With Bread, the three authors invite readers into an Ignatian spiritual practice.

In this ancient practice, each evening, very briefly, prayerfully, one considers their “bread,” naming

For what am I most grateful?—that is your bread

And, for what am I least grateful?

It's a simple, powerful, profound practice of discernment—hold on to what gives you life, sleep with bread.

Sometimes I wonder if that angel of God who waited on Elijah is the same Spirit speaking to us:

“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.”

Today, I invite you to think about your bread—to think about what gives you life.

It might be literal bread, but for many of us it's figurative bread.

What is your bread? What is nourishing you?

What do you hold (or need to hold) in these waning summer days?

What bread can you share with others?

For me, I finished 12 years of ministry at Salem English Lutheran Church at the end of June.

As hard as leave-taking is (and you know this, having said good bye to Pastor Shirley) at its best, there is bread—the tears, the stories recalled, the ways God is active, the relationships built.

All that is bread for this journey into a new community, here, into this community with you.

The last 5 weeks have been rest and family time, some good camping and vacation, and a lot of deep

house cleaning, bunk beds to put together, stuff to purge, space and time to clear my heart and mind

All this has been bread bread for the journey.

What about for you, what is your bread?

I attended the memorial service for Winnie Frolen yesterday and it was wonderful.

I never had the privilege of meeting Winnie, but seeing a tremendous turn out hearing the stories from many of you, it is clear that she was bread in this Hope community, and in this Southeast neighborhood. Winnie rests now in God's eternal love; even in her death she is Christ's leaven in community.

Each week as we gather 'round the Communion Table, Christ is our bread:

feeding us with forgiveness and new life,
drawing together the beloved community of all time and place,
nourishing us with grace and mercy to envision and then enact justice yet to come.

At this table we become bread for one another in our deepest brokenness and our greatest joy.

At this table we become leaven for the Hope community, but, too, for the University, and for our circles of friends and family, and for those we engage all week long.

...Leaven that grows into something more than itself, for it is nothing less than the Holy Spirit at work.

At this table we find not only solace, but also sustenance and strength to be Christ's body in a hurting world.

This week I met one of that crew of eight seniors who have graduated and will head to college soon.

He told me about his plans, and about leave-taking—yes leave taking from family and friends, but from this place, this community that means the world to them.

Today and in the weeks to come we use another ancient practice, a prayer of Godspeed.

Near the end of the service we'll invite those who want prayers of Godspeed to come up around the baptismal font for a short prayer.

We'll lay on hands and give thanks for their presence in this community, and we'll pray for the journey ahead, for safety, for new community, for learning and growth, and for God to bind us together even across the miles.

I know that today we'll pray for Rachel Tetlie, but perhaps there are others who are heading out or moving.

If so, you are invited to come forward too.

As we send Rachel and then others off with Godspeed, we prepare to welcome new faces into our community in the coming weeks.

We will be bread for new folks making a home in this neighborhood, and they will be bread for us.

Let us pray: Christ, our bread, fill us, renew us, strengthen us for the journey yet to come, and by your grace, enliven us for your work in the world. Give us bread for this journey. Amen.