



## **Sermons from Northwood United Church**

**“The Bread of Life”**

**John 6:24-35**

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May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Ah the smell of homemade bread. We were in the Maritimes a couple of weeks ago, the home of the world famous (or at least famous in my circles of travel) Maritime Brown Bread!! Where Treena grew up, molasses is king- and not just any molasses. It has to be Crosby's fancy molasses. I found out last week that they are making some pretty great dark rum out of Crosby's, not to mention molasses candy, molasses cookies, and of course Maritime Brown Bread. Nothing quite like a good lunch of wholesome soup with the homemade bread that soothes the soul. And what do you put on the bread? Well, butter of course, and Crosby's fancy molasses. It is wonderful.

I have a million associations with bread. You may have too. I remember coming home from elementary school with my friend Pat who was a 1970s version of a latch-key kid. And he would come home with me after school because often there was bread fresh out of the oven! A thick slice with butter and Pat was in heaven. I have at times in my life had what we called the monster growing in a bowl on top of the fridge- the sour dough starter that made unbelievably tasty and chewy bread. And then there was the time I went with Lily Grimmet to her summer house up behind the town of Burton. 80 year old Lily wanted to show me the homestead she grew up on and where she spent the 3 or 4 summer months. She hadn't opened the place up yet when we arrived up the long two track road to the house on the hill surrounded by hay fields and old lilac bushes and a few old apple trees. It was a lovely little old rustic log home with a bent sheet metal pantry and a enamel sink. I was intrigued by the pantry and unlatched the fold down counter only to reveal a loaf of bread which had been there for 9 months. I couldn't believe it and as I exclaimed, Lily came over and said, "Oh dear, I must have left that when I closed the place up last September." Gingerly I lifted the plastic bag out from the breadbox. It was Wonderbread and it was truly a wonder. It was not blue and furry like I had expected. It was white and soft and utterly without blemish or mould. It was squishy, not hard, and I shivered at the thought of the chemicals in this loaf of bread and the process of disinfecting that must have been necessary to make it appear fresh after braving three entire seasons in the breadbox. It looks like bread, and claims to be bread, but its association with the stuff we had at Kings Landing, the stuff my mother made, the stuff that came from the monster on top of my fridge is so tenuous as to be an entirely different species altogether. This was lab made bread not home made bread. It was a sham in the bread world- a cheap fake to anyone raised on fresh out of the oven at home bread.

This Sunday's gospel lesson, comes from a section of John's gospel in which the author gathers together the bread stories of Jesus. Last week it was the feeding of the 5000 with 2 fish and five barley loaves. This week the people are reminded of how Moses fed in the wilderness with manna, and Jesus refers to himself as the bread of life. These are stories meant to be read on at least two levels, the real level of our physical hunger for real bread and the level of our spiritual hunger for nourishment of the spirit and the soul. The great church father, Augustine prayed, "You hast created us for yourself, O God, so that our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." It is this restless hunger that propelled thousands of people into the desert in search

of Jesus known to offer healing to those in need. And when they found their bellies filled they pursued him thinking that food for the belly is what he was all about.

But it was and is the deeper hunger, the hunger of the spirit and the soul that he focussed on- the hunger for healing, for meaning, for the clear sense that we are loved, for serenity. It is this restless hunger that perpetuates powerful forces within contemporary culture that would sidetrack us, and make us think that our deep hunger can be satisfied by things we might buy, entertainment we might see, the way we might look, the financial security we might achieve. Consumerism is one of the ways that we manifest our spiritual hunger. It is the restlessness of our hearts that convinces us to “Supersize It” and to build bigger and bigger homes. It is this restless longing that calls many to search the internet for community in an attempt to feel loved and connected. Our restless longing often comes in the form of addictions and it gets expressed in the misled belief that we need to be funnier, more attractive, smarter, wealthier, and more successful in order to fill our restless hunger.

But the restlessness in the human heart will never be finally stilled by any object or project or person or place. The longing is eternal. It is God-given. It is the place where humanity and God are most intimately connected. And it is actually, good. Without the yearning that resides at our core, we would lose our vitality; our creativity; our search for meaning. Our longing is but an eternal echo of the Divine Longing, which has created us and will sustain us.

When Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” he was saying, “that longing that propelled you out into the desert, or into the church or into the mall or onto the internet is only ultimately satisfied in another way, a way of deep goodness, richness and blessing. The bread you smell and the bread we will taste in a few moments are a tangible expression of the sweet, tender, wholesome, satisfying unconditional love and blessing at the heart of God. So when you come to the table this morning, bring with you that blessed longing that you may well have tried to satisfy in a dozen different ways, lay it on the table, and be filled with grace and blessing. Amen