

About a year ago Kay visited a friend who was moving. When she went in the house she noticed the delicious, mouth-watering, smell of bread baking. Susan told Kay that people were coming that afternoon to look at the house with the possibility of buying it. She'd heard that the smell of baking bread gives a house a cosy, homey atmosphere that helps to sell it. That got me thinking. Maybe that's part of the reason why the early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper every day. The smell of the freshly baked communion bread would help make them feel at home. Then I wondered what kind of effect it would have if every Sunday our sanctuary were filled with the aroma of freshly baked-bread. Maybe it would just make us hungry and want to get home more quickly to lunch. But maybe the visitor hunting for a church would say, "This place smells like home." Maybe we'd all feel more like we really belong and that we're in the home of our Father.

In our Gospel lesson we hear Jesus say he's the Bread of Life. He contrasts this Bread from heaven with ordinary food that spoils. The people to whom he was talking had just been fed miraculously with a few loaves of bread. They had worked hard to go by foot to meet Jesus with the hopes of getting more bread. Jesus says to them, and to us, "Don't work for the food that spoils but for the food that lasts into eternal life."

There are two kinds of food. Food that gets moldy and Food that lasts forever. First, think of the food that spoils; the leftover spinach that you put into a tupperware container and somehow gets pushed to the back of the refrigerator and you discover it five months later all covered with slimey, fuzzy, putrid mold that smells bad enough to gag a maggot when you take the lid off. Spinach is good, but it spoils. When Jesus spoke of food that spoils he was speaking of all sorts of things that are good, that

are nourishing, things that we need in order to live; food, money, clothing, shelter, popularity. But none of them last. They're like food that spoils.

When Jesus says not to work for food that spoils he didn't mean that we aren't suppose to work for our food. God has commanded all the descendants of Adam to work honestly for our food. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." And St. Paul wrote, "He that will not work, neither let him eat." Furthermore, Jesus placed quite a bit of importance on ordinary food. Jesus fed the hungry. He warns us that at the final judgment he'll divide the sheep and goats on the basis of our having fed Christ in the person of the starving. We've all seen what happens to people in Ethiopia when they don't have the food that spoils. We don't live by bread alone, but neither do we live very long without it. So Jesus taught us to pray daily for the bread that spoils. —"Give us this day our daily bread." — We need the food that spoils in order to live.

But we are what we eat. Ordinary food spoils. And if we try to satisfy all our human hungers on perishables, we'll perish. If we want to enjoy eternal life we have to hunger for the food that lasts forever. When I see the hollow faces of starving Ethiopians I see also what happens to us spiritually when we try to satisfy all our hungers on the food that spoils. There's a hunger in our hearts that can't be satisfied with ordinary food. When we try to satisfy ourselves only with things that spoil we're like someone who eats 3 square meals a day only to get sick because their diet hasn't included some essential vitamin. We become like gluttons who raid the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition.

Jesus tells us the cure for spiritual malnutrition is found in himself. He's the Food that's always fresh, that doesn't spoil. He's the Bread of Life. Bread enough to feed the world. Food that endures to eternal life.

Food that nourishes us into eternal life. If you search down into the depths of your soul until you come to the lowest depth of all, underlying all other wants you'll find a craving for what's infinite-- a something that desires perfection-- a wish that nothing but the thought of that which is eternal can satisfy. Deep down all of us hungers for something of eternal value, something that will give us lasting value. Something that we can't spoil and won't go sour on us.

Sometimes we discover this hunger almost by accident. You may be walking hand in hand with a grandchild. You may be sitting silently in the living room with your wife drinking a cup of coffee. You may be alone, looking up at the stars at night. You may be talking on the telephone to a friend you haven't heard from for years. In the ordinary events of everyday life sometimes we're stabbed by a feeling of gratitude. How good life has been to us. How lucky we are. And these little passing joys begin to awaken within us a hunger for a joy that will last forever.

Last weekend we had a block sale on Kinsey Avenue. Kay and I ransacked the manse for things we no longer need and can't use. We sold things for a dime that I bought for a dollar years ago. Once the boys thought they couldn't live without an Ewok village. Now it's clutter to be gotten rid of for whatever anyone is foolish enough to pay for it. I suppose that's the way it'll be at the end of our lives. We'll ransack our memories and possessions and we'll discover the difference between what was valuable and what has cluttered up our hearts for years. We'll look at so many things and say, "I was really dumb to work so hard for this stupid thing, this piece of junk." We'll go over our lives filled with clutter, with houses and cars and expensive suits and books and computers and swimming pools and jewelry and love affairs and broken promises and

spoiled opportunities. We'll discover things shoved to the back of our memories that have grown moldy and stink when we bring them out into the open air. Of all the things we worked hard for and that we hungered for what will have lasting value?

Christians find in Christ One who satisfies a hunger that not even the blue plate special can satisfy. Sometimes in the preaching of the Word and the breaking of the bread we meet Jesus in a very special way. He's always there but sometimes we recognize his presence and we begin to discover within ourselves that he can satisfy our deepest hunger.

Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast:
Glad when Thy gracious smile we see,
Blest when our faith can hold Thee fast.

This hunger brings us again and again to Christ in prayer, and to his Word. Again and again we come to this table to eat sacramentally the Bread of Life. We find that, for us, Jesus is absolutely essential for truly human life. He's indispensable for the fulfilment of all our deepest hopes and dreams. The smell of freshly baked bread reminds us of the presence of Jesus and the security and comfort of the home of our Heavenly Father. It calls the prodigal feeding on corn husks back home to the father's table.

Evangelism, said D.T. Niles, is one beggar telling another beggar where to find the Bread of Life. This morning I'm one beggar telling the rest of you beggars that the Bread of Life is here for us to feed upon in faith. Christ is here. This morning we're serving fresh bread to everyone who hungers for what can't spoil and for what not even we can spoil. So many of our hopes have been spoiled. We've spoiled so many things. But this morning I invite you to receive the Bread of Life that will never spoil, that not even you can spoil. Bread that will preserve you into eternal life.

In a sense we're pretending. I want you to make believe that the one who breaks the bread and blesses the cup is not a forty year old Presbyterian minister, but Jesus of Nazareth. I want you to make believe that the diced Strohman's Ranch Bread and the Welch's grape juice are his flesh and blood. Make believe that by swallowing them you're swallowing his life into your life and that there's nothing on earth or in heaven more important for you to do than this. It's a game you play because he said to play it. "Do this in remembrance of me." If it seems like a childish thing to do, do it in remembrance that you're a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is called Holy Communion because when eating at this table, we believe that we're communing with the Eternal, with the Holy One himself, his Spirit enlivening our spirits, heating the blood and gladdening the heart — just the way wine can. Let's, therefore, draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to our nourishment. Don't work for the food that spoils but for the food that endures into eternal life. The Bread of Life, the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve you body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving.

Amen