Sunday, August 15, 1982
THE BREAD OF LIFE
John 6:24-35

All of us are familiar with bread, ordinary everyday bread. There is white bread, whole wheat bread, corn bread, rye bread, oatmeal bread, multigrain bread, raisin-nut bread and more. Today, more and more people are reading the labels on food like br.ad which tell the ingredients.

A bread label I read this past week included these ingredients — 100% stone-ground whole-wheat flour, unbleached enriched wheat flour, (niacin, Iron, thiamin, riboflavin) honey, oatmeal, wheat gluten, vegetable shortening, soy flour, rye flour, flaked whole wheat, corn meal, yeast, salt and diamalt. On another loaf of bread, the label read — stone-ground wheat 100% whole wheat flour, water, nonfat milk, unsulphured molasses, partially hydrogenated vegetable shortening, corn syrup, wheat gluten, yeast, salt, butter, calcium propionate to retard spoilage, honey, mono and diglycerides and lecithin.

Both of these labels also stated — no artificial ingredients. I like that in particular. At any rate, bread is something with which we are all familiar.

Jesus told his disciples and the people of his day that he was the “bread of life.” Notice that he did not say he was the desert of life, but bread. It’s a revealing metaphor. In his day, bread could be found on every table. It was the common, basic food for all people. Whether you were rich or poor, you ate bread. Those who had it would not starve or be hungry. In the same way Jesus said that those who had the “bread of life” would never be hungry again. While ordinary bread will satisfy physical hunger, the “bread of life” will satisfy spiritual hunger. It will fill our hunger for meaning and purpose in life.

We know tl1e ingredients of the bread we eat, but what are the ingredients of the “bread of life” which Jesus offers us so that it satisfies our deepest hunger?

1. The basic ingredient of the “bread of life” is God’s love. This is what Jesus Christ brings to us more than anything else. Christ is the love of God made flesh and living among us. Thus, Jesus said, “I am the living bread come down from heaven.”

Once a person knows that he or she is loved and accepted by God, a basic and deep hunger is satisfied. We all have the desire to be loved and accepted. Thus, when one experiences the love of God, then one also knows that he or she has worth, value, dignity, self-esteem. When you are loved, life takes on new meaning and worth.

The sad fact is that many people believe they have to earn their worth — that it has to be worked for. So, they collect things, buy things, save things, and mistakenly believe that this will add to their worth and self-esteem. If you have ever had to make out a financial statement, the bottom line usually is, “your net worth.” But this net worth in assets has nothing at all to do with your personal value, your worth as a human being, although many people think it does.

Your real net worth is made up of the fact that you are loved and accepted by God. And that love does not, cannot be earned in any way — it is freely given. It’s the basic ingredient of the bread of life, just as flour is the basic ingredient of the bread we eat. When you accept God’s love, your hunger for self-esteem and dignity and worth is satisfied.

2. A second ingredient of the “bread of life” which Jesus offers to all of us is God’s forgiveness. A loved person is forgiven over and over again. If you love someone, then you are also ready to forgive that person over and over again.

Once a person has experienced forgiveness, then that individual becomes a forgiving person. There is then a further benefit — once you are forgiven and are forgiving of others you become a free individual. You are no longer a slave to your hurts, to your resentments, to your grudges, to your guilt feelings. Sure, you’ll still have these feelings and emotions, but they won’t rule your life. You’re able to go beyond them, to let them go. Then a heavy burden is lifted.

3. A third ingredient of the “bread of life” is the power of God. As the power and presence of God was in Jesus, so it is also present in each one of us. It’s been there all along, but we haven’t recognized it or been aware of it. Once however that we begin to experience God’s love and forgiveness, then we become more and more aware of God’s spirit and power within us and around us.

As I said, it’s always been there, but we’ve not been aware of it because we’ve been using so much of our energy in dealing with our fears, our resentments, our anger, our frustrations, our low self-esteem and because we’ve been working so hard to earn some feeling of self-worth.

But now we know that there is no place that God is not. God is not selective. God is there where anyone opens his or her life to accept God’s love and forgiveness. And even if the mind is closed, God is there anyway. We are just not conscious of it.

If the bread of life means anything, it means that God lives and dwells among us. You are beloved of God. God is in you as the ocean is in the wave.

These then are the main ingredients of the bread of life — God’s love, God’s forgiveness, God’s Spirit and power. These ingredients are as necessary to us as the food we eat, for we are spiritual beings as well as physical beings.

A person is tired and because tired, irritable and impossible. But let that person have a meal and likely enough, throwing aside gloom and ill humor, that individual will become a different person. Why? Because the strength of the food has passed into him or her. So, it is too that the “bread of life” God’s love, God’s forgiveness, God’s power, feed us, sustain us and give us new strength and new meaning in our living.

The bread we eat this morning in our Communion is symbolic of the bread of life. As you eat this bread in faith, you are eating more than bread. You are partaking of the bread of life itself and it will satisfy your deepest spiritual hunger, your hunger for meaning, for acceptance for self-esteem. Amen.