

Let us pray.

Compassionate God, send your Holy Spirit to feed us with your Word.

Amen.

I've been thinking a lot about the food we carry with us.

In my purse right now I've got two granola bars

Just in case.

If you have younger kids,

Maybe you are currently holding a small stockpile of cereal in baggies.

Long car trips can involve careful preparation when it comes to food.

After they got married,

My parents drove from Madison, Wisconsin to Rochester, New York

To visit the Swift family.

They were short on cash so they packed all the food they'd need

For breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks:

A cooler full of sandwiches.

To make it special, they used their resources to create variety:

The night before the trip they stayed up making

Plain baloney, baloney and ketchup, plain cheese, cheese and baloney,

Cheese, baloney and ketchup ...

So as they drove they'd say:

\*Lip smack\* "Hmmmmm ... what do I want this time?"

Baloney and ketchup, please!"

Recently, my husband Sean and I drove from New Jersey to Illinois

Stopping and visiting with family along the way.

We were feeling a little displaced:

In preparation for our move to Slovakia this month

We moved out of our apartment,

Sold or gave away all our furniture,

Stored some things with Sean's parents and

Donated most of the rest.

We were definitely at the start of an exciting journey,  
But feeling a little lost in the wilderness on the way there.  
Before we left New York and headed for Ohio,  
My Grandma Swift handed us a bag full of food for the road:  
Chicken salad sandwiches,  
Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches,  
Bananas and apples.  
For me and Sean,  
That bag of comfort food made a home for us  
In the midst of our wanderings.  
Experiencing this blessing got me thinking:  
What are the qualities of the food we pack for the road,  
Our “bread for the journey”  
And does this traveling food have anything in common with the bread  
We find in our texts today?

I think that bread for the journey has four main qualities:

**First**, it is either very cheap or free.

We pack food for trips, in part, to save money.

And the fact that this food is so wonderful

*And* so inexpensive

Adds to its appeal.

**Second**, it is abundant.

Maybe because it's economical,

It seems like there is always enough

Or more than enough

peanut butter and bread to go around.

**Third**, it is nourishing.

The bread we pack for our journeys is often more wholesome

Than the food we'd buy at a rest stop.

It is fuel for our bodies and minds,

And can be fuel for our spirits, too,  
Like the sandwiches Grandma Swift made  
That made us feel at home again.  
Or sandwiches my parents made,  
That became a story told and retold,  
And part of our family story.

**Fourth**, bread for the journey is satisfying.

Whether it is baloney and cheese,  
Chicken salad, or peanut butter and jelly,  
The food we take with us is designed to satisfy our hunger  
And leave us with that wonderful feeling  
Of having had *enough*.

Our Gospel text for today puts it this way:

“And all ate and were filled.”

The beginning of the lesson finds Jesus on a journey

Trying to find some time and space to be alone

After he learns that John the Baptist has been murdered.

The text tells us that a large crowd of people responded to this same news

By finding and following Jesus.

Even in his grief, Jesus doesn't turn them away

But takes care of their physical and spiritual needs.

As it got close to dinnertime,

the disciples started to worry about the logistics of feeding all these people.

Does the impromptu picnic of the 5,000,

*Plus* women and children.

Meet our bread-for-the-journey criteria?

By multiplying the resources they already had with them

Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd surely spent less

than if they'd gone into the villages—

the equivalent of a rest stop—

to buy food.

The resources they had ended up being so abundant

It was miraculous—12 baskets of leftovers!

Bread and fish made a nourishing and satisfying meal.

But just like Grandma's Swift bag of comfort food,

And my parent's cooler full of memories,

There's more going on here than just eating.

With the physical sustenance came Christ's blessing

And a meal that fortified his presence with the people

His ministry among them

And their ministry to each other as baskets were passed

and the meal was shared.

We can compare the spiritual significance of this meal

To meals we have eaten after funerals.

Food that is physically simple, good and comforting.

Food that satisfies many needs.

Shared by people gathered to mourn together,

Glad to spend some time together before getting back on the road.

Our first lesson today builds on this spiritual understanding of food.

In this hymn of hope,

Israel looks forward to the end of its exile in Babylon.

In this case, food becomes a metaphor for God's Word

Which will nourish and sustain the people on their journey home.

God offers this nourishment completely "without price."

And the prophet compares the free grace of God's love and covenant

With the costly, unsatisfying idol worship of Babylon.

The prophet uses images of abundance:

"wine and milk without money and without price."

Wine is a product of farmed soil; milk a product of good grazing land—  
Having both means having everything you could possibly need or want:  
*Abundant* refreshment offered as gifts from God.

The prophet urges the people to listen  
Because the Word of God is good, rich, nourishing, satisfying food.  
“Listen,” says the prophet, “so that you may *live*.”

Wherever we are in our journeys  
God’s Word, the bread of life,  
Is offered freely,  
abundantly,  
to nourish and satisfy our deep need for grace.  
The exiles in Babylon looked to God’s Word and covenant to be their bread  
Before their journey home even began.  
When many of them, born in exile,

Could only imagine what “home” would be.

Jesus, the disciples, and a very large crowd

Stopped in the middle of nowhere

On the road to somewhere else

To mourn and eat together,

taking care of each other,

Coming together around the miracle of God’s Word made flesh,

Jesus: walking, healing, eating and grieving among them.

The Word of God is the best bread for the journey.

Manna was free, abundant and nourishing

But, like a baloney and cheese sandwich,

It started to get a little funky after a day on the road.

The most enduring, satisfying bread is the Word of God,

Whether it be God’s covenant with Israel

Or God's Word as we hear it, sing it,

And actually taste and see it at Holy Communion.

During the children's sermon we prayed:

"Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest,

And let these gifts to us be blessed.

Blessed be God who is our Bread;

May all the world be clothed and fed."

When we come forward for communion,

We become guests at Jesus' table

Receiving a meal of food and forgiveness

Given freely and abundantly

To nourish and sustain our bodies and souls.

In the bread and wine, we receive the Word of God,

God who is our Bread.

Freely, abundantly and fully fed,

We are sent out into the world to feed others.

Taking care of each other spiritually and physically

Like the disciples and the crowd passing baskets of bread and fish.

Jesus taught us to pray:

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

In the Small Catechism, Luther writes that “daily bread” means

“Everything included in the necessities and nourishments for our bodies,

Such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money,

property, an upright spouse, upright children,

upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers,

good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor,

good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

God, whose Word is so needed and nourishing

Cares about the “necessities and nourishment of our bodies”—

Including not only food, drink, shelter and clothing

But all good things.

As with the bread that is the Word of God,

God provides this daily bread freely and abundantly,

And Luther reminds us

That God gives us daily bread whether we pray for it or not

Even though we've done nothing

And can do nothing to deserve it.

One of the ways God gives this daily bread

Is by our hands

As we are called to share the abundance of creation

With neighbors in need.

In a few minutes we will sing this prayer together:

“Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread;

Still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead.

As you, Lord, in deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul,  
By your Spirit send your power to our world to make it whole.”  
The hymn goes on to tell how we are called by worship  
Sent out on our journey to serve God and neighbor.

As Sean and I prepare to move to Slovakia  
We'll pack some food for the road,  
Some bread for the journey.  
There will be granola bars in our backpacks  
And maybe a peanut butter sandwich or two in case of a delayed plane.  
We'll also carry our daily-bread in the blessings of prayers,  
Support and good will from faithful neighbors.  
Especially our neighbors here at St. Luke's.  
And we'll go out, nourished and sustained by the Word of God  
That you have shared with us  
The bread of life, the best bread for the journey.  
Amen.



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