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Proper14B21
St. Mark's, LaGrange

She had done it 1,000 times before.

I watched my grandma make yellow cake with chocolate icing
for birthdays and baby showers;
for Sunday dinners and even for my wedding.

More importantly,
I have *eaten* that yellow cake with chocolate icing, so many times!

Grandma grabbed a box of mix,
stirred it up,
and the cakes took care of themselves.

The icing is what mattered
Simple,
but not so easy.

I was reminded of that a few Sundays ago.

My mom and I were standing in the same kitchen,
the same 200 square feet
where my grandma made most of those cakes

Things didn't go so well for my mom and I.

Ours tasted good.

But it didn't look so good,
the icing didn't set up so good.

It dripped all over the cake.

I saw a 100 places it might have gone wrong,
and I'm still trying to figure it out.

That yellow cake with chocolate icing
It's simple,
but it's not easy.

Jesus has said it all before.

To all kinds of people
in all kinds of places,
and he's saying again today:

"I am the bread of life."

He offered a bit of proof:

just a few weeks ago

we heard about how he took 5 loaves

and made it bread enough for everybody.

He offered proof and he offered himself:

"I am the bread of life."

But Jesus found out that it's a little different
when you start talking that way back home,
when you start working miracles around the folks that know you best.

“Just who does he think he is?”

“Isn't this Joseph's son?

We know where he came from;
he's no better than us.”

“We are in trouble
if he's the one that's going to save us.
Don't you think?”

Jesus is trying to offer them a gift,
trying to let them in on something.

He's talking to the folks back home,
and it's not going too well.

“What kind of gift can he offer us?

“We know him;
we know who he is.”

But that's just it:
they don't know a thing about him.
They don't know where he came from;
they don't know where he's going;
they don't know him at all.

They are too busy being sure they know everything about him,
that they can't hear what he says.

When you are a Jew,
raised on stories about crossing through the waters out of Egypt,
it's hard to imagine anything better
than the manna that fell from heaven.

But Jesus is telling them that there is.
"Your ancestors ate that manna
and they died,
but this bread that I've got,
you can eat it and live!"

Well it's bad enough if you're a Jew,
hearing that sort of thing,
but imagine being from Nazareth:
"Just who does he think he is?
Our neighbor,
and he thinks that he's better than Moses?"

— — —

"I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Reminds me of the chocolate cake and sweet tea
I had at my grandma's house.

Proof that God loves me
and wants me to be happy.

Yellow cake with chocolate icing;
you could call that the bread of life.
Not because you'll never be hungry again;

I was hungry the very next morning.

No, that cake is life
because it is made with love,
because of all the thousand times I can remember it,
with candles
or on a big concrete picnic table outside the church
or just because.

I long for that cake.

My grandma made me one for my last birthday she was alive,
showed up at my house and we ate it on the porch.

I ache for that to happen again.

I wonder:

What are you aching for?
What has got your mouth dried out with want?
What's that thing that leaves you feeling scared
it won't ever happen again?

I bet it's something like eternal life;
I bet it's something like living water.
I bet it's something like what Jesus is talking about today.

"I am the bread of life."

It sounds simple;
but it's not easy.

Simple enough to think of Jesus as bread:
we say something like it every week,
coming up to that altar for communion.

Simple enough to let the words wash over you.
But never easy;
never easy to believe them,
to live like we believe them.

Having faith means offering hope to an often hopeless world.
Trusting God means showing up for each other,
even when it's complicated.

Which we have done!

Think about it:

It was **NOT** easy to show up for each other last year,
online,
or wearing masks,
uncertain of even the most basic things.

It's not easy to show up for each other in any circumstances these days,
We proclaim a faith that says we are one:
one body
one spirit
one church
one God and Father of us all.

We live in a world that says we are NOT one.

Look around,
around town,
around the internet,
around anywhere you like,
and you will see churches that proclaim a different faith,

a faith that says not, we are one,
but instead, "you are not one of us,"

*you are not one of us, if you vote a certain way.
you are not one of us if you love a certain way.
you are not one of us if you worship a certain way.
you are not one of us if...if...if...*

There are a thousand ways we can separate ourselves,
as many distinctions between us
as there are people alive in the world.

From our views on COVID or climate change
as if the natural world cares all that much for our point of view,
To our understanding of what it means to be offered eternal life.

Whatever our ideas, they CAN be ways to separate ourselves.

Only God can draw us together.
Only in God can we say that there are “many gifts, but the same spirit.”
Only in God can we pray for our enemies,
and turn the other cheek.

One of my favorite things about this church is how different we all are.
People who vote differently;
people who ask different questions of the Almighty;

It's great...but it's messy.
It's messy...but it's a gift.

It sounds simple...but it's never easy.

Like eternal life.
Like the Bread of Life.
Like making a really good yellow cake with chocolate icing.

It sounds simple...but it's never easy,
to trust Jesus,
to believe in life.

Jesus promises so much,
more than we could possibly imagine.

It's never easy to live like we believe in life,
to take each step
with just a bit of faith
that the earth won't fall down beneath us.

It almost never does,
but when the worst happens happens,
it's a confirmation of all the fears we held most dear,
of all the bad stories we tell about ourselves and others

The one about how we tend to ruin everything;
the one about how things just never seem to go our way;
the one about how no matter how hard we try,
everybody else seems to have it just a little bit easier.

Whatever your story,
the terrible story you tell yourself,
the untruth you have come to believe;
it has at least a little bit to do
with whatever it is you're aching for
and that ache,
has everything to do with the Living Water
and the Bread that will never leave you hungry.

It's hard to believe in eternal life when you need it most;
and most times you won't even think twice about it,

but every now and again,
just every once in a while,

you will feel that ache
and your fear will rise up in the pit of your stomach,

and your ache
and your fear
and your want
will seem like altogether nothing

up against the promises of God.