“Living Bread” John 6:51-58

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” The Gospel of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Grace and peace to you all in the name of our lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a wonderful Native American story you’ve likely heard...about a grandfather who is teaching his grandson an important lesson about life. The wise grandfather sits his grandson down, and begins to tell him about a battle—a fight. He says: “There is a fight going on inside of me. It is a terrible fight,” he says, “It is a fight going on between TWO WOLVES.”

“One wolf is evil—he lives only for anger and greed, arrogance, ego, self-pity.” “The other wolf is good: he lives for peace and hope, generosity, humility, compassion and faith.” Then the grandfather says, “The very same fight is going on inside of you. In fact, these wolves fight inside of each and every one of us.” “Which wolf will win?” the grandson asks. “The wolf that win,” the grandfather says, “is the one that you feed.”

I remind you of this old adage today because it’s a good reminder 😊. The wolf that will win will always be the wolf that we feed. It connects well with our first reading about the banquet of wisdom—where we feed ourselves with insight and understanding—so as to grow in compassion and faith. The wolf that we feed becomes that which lives and breathes inside us. It leads well into our gospel, too, where Jesus names himself as the very food for our souls—HE fills us and shapes us for mission and ministry—for life and faith. Jesus says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” Living bread.

BREAD is one of most basic of foods—it has been for centuries. One could live on just bread (and water) for quite a long time—perhaps indefinitely...Did you know that in some languages, the word for “bread” and “food” is actually the same? The same word.

In East Asian languages, the word for "rice" and "food" is often the same. In some Melanesian languages, its yams. If Jesus had been Melanesian, he would have probably spoken about yams: I am the yams of life. In this sense, he is our most basic need that fills our hunger.
But more than that, he is our LIVING bread. It struck me in a new way this past week, about what that living bread means for us—it means that Jesus fills us up; it means that Jesus lives in us. Clearly, I am no rocket scientist, and maybe this isn’t a profound epiphany for you—but I find that an incredible promise: that Jesus fills us up. Even beyond the promises of Holy Communion when we eat and drink together, the WORD of God, that is Jesus fills us up. Jesus is our living bread—he fills us up and lives in us.

What difference will that make, in the course of our every day? When we are in a meeting at work, or eating dinner with our family, or in line at the grocery store, or involved in a contentious political conversation…what difference will it make that Jesus lives in us?

I HOPE it will make a great deal of a difference. Not in the sense that Jesus somehow “perfects” us—that Jesus living in us makes us our own little God walking graciously on earth—instead, the opposite is more true. Jesus living in us makes us ever more aware of our sin: our ego, our selfishness, our self-righteousness. The living bread of God feeds us humility, and compassion and forgiveness—all the gifts we need from others too.

In our gospel, John uses really human, earth-y terms, to describe how Jesus becomes this living part of us: If you read all of chapter 6 in John’s gospel, you will see how Jesus really pushes the issue and makes everyone uncomfortable when he talks about his disciples eating his flesh and drinking his blood—gross, Jesus!

And it was gross to them…In fact, the Aramaic phrase, "eater of flesh" was a title for the devil. Yet Jesus would take what was viewed as evil and dark and sinful and destructive, and bring life and hope through it. Jesus would not BE the one who destroys us, but the one who feeds us—fills us up with himself.

Over and over again in the Bible, over and over again through Jesus’ ministry—we see God able to take what’s sinful and dark and destructive, and turn it into something hope-filled and life-giving. Jesus welcomes those who were excluded and says the kingdom of God is for such as these. Jesus transforms people and communities to become ALWAYS less fearful in the face of the other; more open to participate in God’s kingdom, here and now.

Through the cross: this instrument of torture, GOD proclaims LIFE and HOPE for us. Even out of death, God creates life. Every time we come forward for Holy Communion we remember Jesus’ death, while at the same time being filled with his life.

You know the saying, “you are what you eat”? What a great thing to think about every time you hear the words, “the body of Christ given for you.” What we consume become a part of us.

And as the church, as the body of Christ, we are more than Jesus’ followers, we are extensions of his very self. “And the word became flesh and lived among us,” those are the opening words of the gospel of John. “Incarnate” means to become fleshy (it is the verb form of the Greek word, s arp, which means flesh). God becomes fleshy in Jesus—God comes close to us, in Jesus. God enters into our lives, in Jesus. God feed us and nourishes us, with the living bread from heaven. Jesus lives in us, and makes
us living bread for the world.

*Living Bread* is what Trinity has been for me over these last years. Most of you now know that I have accepted a new call, down the road a bit, and will only be with you for another month. It is not easy ever to say goodbye to people you love. But I am grateful—that is how I feel, more than anything else right now—I am grateful, that YOU are part of my story, that I have been a part of yours. God has filled this community up, and YOU ARE living bread for one another, and for our world. May you trust that is true, and may knowing that Christ lives in you, change the way you go about this day. Amen.