



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**The Real Bread Miracle  
Text: John 6:30-35  
Rev. Dr. John E. Manzo  
October 5, 2008**

A man was emigrating to the United States and spoke hardly any English. He was concerned because he didn't know what there was to eat and if he would enjoy it. A friend of his said that he should just go to the counter on a restaurant or diner and say, "I would like apple pie and coffee please." His friend said that this was truly delicious American food.

So the man came to the United States, sat at a counter and said, "I would like apple pie and coffee please." He was given his apple pie and coffee and decided it was the most delicious thing he had ever eaten.

Meal after meal he sat down and said, "I would like apple pie and coffee please," until he reached the point of saturation. The apple pie and coffee were great, but they had grown old. He observed a man eating something next to him and in careful English, he asked the man what the man was eating. The man said, "This is a ham sandwich."

So the next meal came and the man who came to the United States said, "I would like a ham sandwich and coffee please." He said it with great pride because he knew he had gotten the English down perfectly.

But the woman at the counter asked, "Do you want that on white, wheat, pumpernickel, seeded rye, unseeded rye, a wrap, or pita?" To which the man replied, "I would like apple pie and coffee please."

He was stumped by the bread.

Bread is one of those universal things. When we celebrate Holy Communion today, on World Communion Sunday, we are going to speak of and use various types of bread. They all have one thing in common. They are bread. They might be very different from each other, they may look and feel different from each other, they may taste very differently, but they are all bread.

Often, in the Bible, when we speak of bread, and miracles of bread, we tell the story of manna in the desert and the story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes. Those two stories, however, are mere sustenance stories. This narrative from John goes deeper, much deeper when Jesus calls himself the bread of life. "I am the bread of life."

Whenever we encounter an "I am" statement in John's Gospel the meaning is far richer than Jesus of Nazareth saying "I am." It is a very direct reference to YHWH on the mountain calling himself, "I am," to Moses. Jesus is making a strong reference to his own divinity and suggesting to us that the real bread miracle is the nurturing of God.

Like bread that sustains us in life, it is the nourishing power of God that nurtures us even beyond us just living day to day. In that we find the real bread miracle.

In my mind this miracle has a demand and a promise all wrapped together.

First, the demand is this. Welcome people to the table. Radically.

Christianity has had an historic struggle with Holy Communion. Over the course of church history the Christian Church has treated Holy Communion like it was a very special, very exclusive meal that is prepared only for a few. The theory behind it is good; a sacred meal ought to be special.

The specialness of the meal, however, is not its exclusivity but its inclusivity. It is not a meal made special by the elite people around the table, but by the fact that everyone is welcome at the table. And everyone is great until these everyone become ANYONE, and we think that someone for some reason, ought not be there.

Look at Jesus' words. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. That 'whoever' is a radical statement of saying that everyone is welcome, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.

The specialness and preciousness of the meal isn't because it is for an elect few; it is special because all are welcome. When we miss this or forget this, we miss the miracle.

The second thing is the promise. And I learned the promise not from textbooks, not by great theologians, but by children.

In my last church we were responding to a United Church of Christ General Synod Resolution on children and Holy Communion. We, like many churches in our tradition, invited children to come to the table of the Lord after Confirmation, but not before. The General Synod Resolution was suggesting to churches to rethink this. Here we were a church that welcome everyone to our table----except our own children.

We began a study and did a lot of talking and praying, and discussion. I had spent time with the children and talked to them about it and I was teaching an adult Sunday School class one morning and one of the member of the church, a wonderful man who had deeply rooted beliefs and traditions, said that he did not approve of this. The children, he said, "did not understand."

I sat back in my chair and asked the class, of adults, what Holy Communion was. I was met with dead silence. Everyone had an opinion on how we should practice doing the Sacrament,

but no one could define it.

But the children did. When I asked them what Holy Communion was one of the children said that it was a way that Jesus shows that he loves us. Simple.

I asked the adults if they could top this and, of course, they couldn't. And it is in those words we see the promise. The Bread of Life, something we now call Holy Communion, reminds us, profoundly, that God loves us.

This day, a day when we join Christians throughout the world and all gather around the table of the Lord we are reminded that Holy Communion is not about practice, it is not about deep theological definitions, it is simply and profoundly a way that Jesus shows His love for us.

This is a day of a demand to be welcoming, and a promise of God's love. It is a day when we gather and Worship and truly celebrate the real bread miracle.