

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today we continue our exploration of John's gospel focused on bread. Last Sunday, Vicar Vicky was back with us, and she shared a powerful sermon about the word "belief" in John's gospel. She reminded us that "**belief**" in John's gospel is always a **verb**, which means its **active**. It's not something you have but it's something done. It could be translated as "**do faith**" or even better, **trust**. And that's an important reminder for us as we look at today's portion of John 6. For this is a continuation from last week's reading, and we started with a verse from last Sunday that reminded us that Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." And, Jesus will repeat that statement in verse 48. But this time, Jesus will explain it in yet another way.

Jesus will remind us of the manna that came from heaven as the Israelites moved through the desert looking for food. In that story, the Israelites grumbled that they were hungry. And, God heard their complaining, and rained down bread from heaven for them to eat.

Today, Jesus used that story to remind them that bread from God is not a new thing. God provides. God liberates. God sustains. That is God's nature. And, Jesus reminded us of the moment when Moses was before the burning bush. You see, before the story manna, Moses stood before a burning bush where God told Moses to liberate his fellow Hebrew people. And Moses asked for God to reveal God's name so he could tell the Hebrew people to prove that God sent Moses. And God replied, "I AM WHO I AM." God said,

say to the Israelites, “**I AM** has send me to you.” And, can we guess what part of speech the name of God is in Hebrew? You might think it’s a noun, but God’s name translated as I AM is a **verb**, it’s active. But, this is where things get really fun, not only is it a verb but it’s also **imperfect**. This designates an action that is continuous, incomplete, or open-ended. It’s not a single action, but it’s a continuing process. It’s often treated as present tense (doing the action now) or future tense (doing the action in the future), BUT it also describes past actions as well. So, God’s name is **active** into the **future**, in the **present**, and in the **past**.

And, Jesus goes on to say that whoever trusts has eternal life. And now, here’s the real kicker. You ready? In that phrase, “**has eternal life**” the word “has” in Greek is present tense. It is not like the name for God which is imperfect with a past, present, and future action verb. It is a **verb**, but it’s only in the **present**.

Ok, if I lost you come back to me now. I know some of you love these teaching-style sermons as a mini-Bible Study and others of you cannot wait until my mouth stops speaking. So, this is where I’m going to pull it together in 3 more mins of a sermon on it.

Quick recap if I lost you: God’s name is I AM. Jesus said, “I AM the bread of life.” That is, God is the bread of life who is active (and whose action continues) in the past, present, and future. Jesus also said, whoever believes (or trusts) has (present tense) eternal life.

You see, we are reminded that God is active (and continues to be) in the past, present, and future. That our trust in God's provisions brings eternal life here and now. Eternal life is not about accessing a future realm. Rather, trusting is based on how you're living. If you're living in such a way that you have knowledge of eternal life, then you have eternal life.

To expand on Jesus as living bread, Theologian Gail Ramshaw reminds us that in Jewish tradition, the Torah was described as if it were bread. The devout consumed the teachings of the prophet and the word of God filled human need. Jesus intensified the metaphoric tradition of describing the Torah as bread by applying it to himself.

And, at first glance, it's such an odd metaphor. But it's also a revealing metaphor. It's a reminder of the truth in the phrase "you are what you eat." After all, in those moments where our physical diet isn't so great, we can more easily feel sick, have inflammation throughout our bodies, and don't feel fully alive. Yet, when we're able to have a balanced diet and give our bodies the nutrients it desires, then we can flourish and live. So too, our spiritual bodies need consistent nutrition. Our spirit needs to be exposed to rich, deep, and vast understandings that strengthen our body. Our spirit sometimes needs to digest ideas and engage in work that can feel painful while still being productive and life-giving.

That's where today's reading from Ephesians steps in. It was meant to be a response to Paul's teaching about Jesus Christ. We heard that their diet was focused on devouring truth. They were obsessed with using language that builds others up and is rooted grace. In following Jesus, this community would feast on kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness. This feast would open them to more fully experience God's gift of eternal life.

So, I wonder how this all influence our collective spiritual life here. Might we see the kindness of handing out bags of love as living in eternal life? Could we imagine speaking truth openly with kindness in meeting about the capital campaign and ministries of the church as living in eternal life? Might our forgiveness of the jerk at work, the boss who doesn't care, and the inconsiderate neighbor allow us to experience eternal life here and now? I dare to think that today's readings are offering us this gift.

Friends, as we go forth this day, be reminded of God's activity in the past, present, and into the future. Know that eternal life is not some reward in the afterlife, but that it is among us now. You have been offered the gift of eternal life. Our trusting in God's word will fuel us to feel and experience that everlasting life. So, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. Amen.