

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

So, Molly already gave you a preview of tonight's sermon. I'll expound on that a little more tonight.

One of the things you might notice as you read through the Scriptures is the important role food and eating play throughout the history of creation. And not just in the history of this creation, but also of that in the world to come.

In the beginning, when God created living creatures, He gave them, including Adam and the woman, every plant yielding seed and every tree with seed in its fruit for food. (cf. Genesis 1:29) As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites lived in the fertile land of Goshen where they ate well. Abraham rushed to have a great meal prepared when the Angel of the LORD appeared to him. (cf. Genesis 18:1-8) Isaiah prophesied great feasts of rich foods and fine wines (cf. Isaiah 25:6) And in the New Testament, Jesus was often condemned by the scribes of Pharisees because he ate with the wrong people, implying that there were right people with which to dine. (cf. Matthew 9:11; 11:19) Many of the apostles wrote about love feasts at the various New Testament congregations (think potlucks and hosted dinners held here, but more frequent). The apostle John was allowed to get a glimpse of the marriage supper of the lamb in His kingdom, attended by a great multitude. (cf. Revelation 19:6-10)

The center-piece of all of this feasting almost always seems to be bread. Bread is, or used to be, considered a staple of life. When God promised that His people would enter their homeland, He described it as a land of wheat and barley, two grains used to make bread. (cf. Deuteronomy 8:8) When Abraham rushed to Sarah to prepare that meal for the Angel of the LORD, the first thing he told her to do was prepare bread. Bread is the foundation of many meals.

And one can't overlook the exodus and its associated meal. Every morning, the Israelites in exodus were to collect enough manna for the day, and twice as much on Friday so that they would have some for Saturday. Every day for 40 years, the people did this and ate bread. "Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat...'" (Exodus 16:15b) Of course, He also supplied them with some quail, but the bread was the focus, and here's why: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3) I'll get to that more in a bit.

Then, of course, there is the greatest of meals ever described and proscribed on this side of creation.

This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight...

They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.

And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.
(Exodus 12:2-6, 8-11)

A lamb and bread and bitter herbs—a feast to celebrate the passing over of death and the gift of life. This feast would become the center of Hebrew and Jewish celebration; it was the high feast of their feasts. Every lamb sacrifice, indeed every sacrifice at the temple, hearkened back to the lamb sacrificed for Passover, because Passover was a celebration of Life (capital-L), that God Himself is sparing His people.

Many of those other sacrifices were done for the forgiveness of sins. It was sin that demanded death in Egypt that first Nisan (their first of months). They Egyptians were hardened in heart against the Israelites and God, not obeying Him and letting His people go, so death was demanded. The first-born males in all of the land would die—a foreshadowing of the eternal death that comes by way of sin—except in those houses in which the feast was celebrated, whose doorposts and lintels were marked with the blood of the slain lamb. (Exodus 12:7) A lamb died in the place of the first-born male in that house—kind of like the ram caught in a thicket was sacrificed in the place of Isaac. (Genesis 22:13) For Isaac, in his place, God provided the lamb (a ram). For the Israelites, God provided lambs to spare their own first-born sons.

It's the same kind of sin that demands your life. Since the fall of Adam and the woman, every son and daughter of the first man and his wife have participated in their sin—even you. You doubt the word of God, especially since you didn't hear it directly from the mouth of God. You think that you can be on God's level, even better than God. You break God's commands. Such hardness of heart demands death, but God provided a Lamb—provides a Lamb—even for you! And this Lamb is no ordinary fluffy creature without blemish; nor does He take your place in death like all those fluff-balls.

Passovers were celebrated year-after-year since that first Nisan, remembering the promises of God and His providence—that He is gracious and merciful to grant life. Right up to the days of Jesus, the Jews continued to celebrate the Passover. It was a marvelous feast. One evening, Jesus planned to do something more as He celebrated the Passover with His disciples. He took the bread—that flat, unleavened, wheat-cake—blessed it, broke it, and gave a piece to each of His disciples and said, "This is my body."

The bread of the Passover is the body of Jesus. And remember, His relative, John, pointed Him out in the crowd and proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) God has provided His Lamb for the people, who would give His body over to death, and give His body as bread for the life of the world.

He took a cup of wine from the Passover feast—the last cup, the cup *after* the supper—and told His disciples to drink it and said, "This is my blood." The blood of the first Passover lambs was painted on the door frames of the houses, and death was spared that home. Now, Jesus gives His blood as the Lamb of God for the life of the world.

This is the new Passover, the feast celebrated in this place, where you eat a morsel of bread and drink a sip of wine, and they are for you forgiveness, life, and salvation, for you have taken your Lord's body and blood into yourself. This is Jesus who declared of Himself, "I am the Bread of Life." (John 6:35) This is Jesus who was proclaimed by the Evangelist St. John to be the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us: Immanuel! (cf. John 1:14) This is Jesus who has given Himself over to death for you in order to give you life, and in this feast of His body and blood, He gives you a foretaste of the feast that St. John was privileged to glimpse, as mentioned earlier.

But there's more to all of this than that. When Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life, He did so in contrast to the manna from the exodus. "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:23-33) Remember, God gave them manna in the wilderness to teach them that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD; in the wilderness outside of Capernaum, He completed the lesson, for Jesus is the Bread of Life and the Word of God.

In fact, when the Word of God is proclaimed over that bread, according to Christ's institution, it is the very Body of Christ. It is no longer bread alone, but the body of Christ—bread on which to live forever!

And so it was, that a little town in Ephrathah was named Bethlehem. It was a small town, like one of the little towns that you could blink and miss as you travel east and south of here—nothing special, just a dot on the map. But, oh, what a name: House of Bread.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. (Micah 5:2-4)

From the House of Bread, by the Word of God, Jesus, the Bread of Life was born. He came to His people, gave Himself to them in order that His body might be given over to death and shed His blood in order that death might eternally pass them over. He is the Lamb of God. He is the Word of God. He is the Bread of Life. Man does not live by bread alone, but find their life in Him! For this Lamb gave Himself over the death and rose from the dead—His death for your life, and His resurrection for your victory over death, so you, too, will rise again at the last day, and join Him and that great multitude at the marriage supper of the Lamb in His kingdom.

Dear believer, you are marked by the sign of the cross upon forehead and breast, marking you as redeemed by Christ the crucified. You are covered in His blood, your robes washed clean in His blood. You consume Him in His Word, and so you have received His grace and mercy. Out of Bethlehem, to the cross outside of Jerusalem, back to His throne in heaven, from which He reigns as your prophet, priest, and king, sending you life in His name by way of the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.