

Sermon for Sunday, August 11, 2024
Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
"Bread for the Journey"
Reverend Marion Pruitt-Jefferson
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa

[Here is a link to the scriptures](#)

If that gospel reading sounded familiar, it's because it's almost exactly like the gospel reading from last Sunday. If you're keeping track, this is week three of the five-week Season of Bread. It's more of Jesus' telling his followers, and even some who doubt him, that he is the Bread of Life. Bread comes down from Heaven, bread that gives life to the world.

I talked last week about the generous welcome that God extends in this place, and especially at this table. And about the lavish gifts of love and grace that we receive here – gifts for healing, strength, peace, and forgiveness. One of the great joys of serving as your pastor has been witnessing how all of these generous gifts of God are at work among you. Often, we only see what happens during the hour we have together in worship, or in fellowship. But I've gotten to peak behind the curtain, in a way, and see all of the amazing things that are happening through the grace of God at work in your lives. I couldn't possibly name everything,

Last Tuesday, I was invited to attend the Stewardship Committee meeting, which, truthfully, I didn't think was going to be the most exciting event of my day. But, oh my goodness, I was so inspired by that meeting and so grateful I got to be there. What I saw was a group of thoughtful, enthusiastic, organized, creative, and prayerfully committed folks, willing to give freely of their time and energy ensuring that our congregation has the financial resources to continue to do ministry in this place. I'm so grateful for that, and your next pastors will be as well.

Attending the Youth Gathering Dessert was another inspiring and touching moment. Listening to those kids talk about their experiences, it's obvious that participating in The Gathering has had a powerful impact on them. But what also delighted me were the adults who had come that evening to hear the kids talk. Many of them had attended Youth Gatherings 30, 40 and even 50 years ago, and they wanted to share a little of their own stories, too. It was so uplifting, and the ice cream sundaes were great, too.

On Thursday morning a group of folks gather for Bible Study. What I loved about being with them is that they spend 15 or 20 minutes sharing their joys and concerns, and then Pr. Ginny offers all of that to God in prayer. It's a beautiful experience of faith and connection. This past week our joys included some very funny stories, and the laughter that filled the room was delightful.

Late on Friday afternoon I wandered down to the kitchen and there were a couple of our members who are faithful volunteers for the quarterly Legal Clinics that are held in our Fellowship Hall. These clinics help our immigrant community members navigate the complicated path to legal status. AAMPARO, Path to Citizenship, Neighbors Helping Neighbors,

and Guatemalan Basics, are just some of the ways members of our community are serving those who are newly arrived in our area.

It's easy to see how the Holy Spirit is at work in serving our neighbors or gathering for prayer and study, but we might overlook how God is at work in paint brushes, lawn mowers, or landscaping. All of these activities happen under the direction of our Facilities and Grounds Committee. So much of the work they do goes unseen. But when you hang around here day after day, you get to witness their ministry of care for all these things. Our building is a tremendous resource, not only for the ministry we do, but also for the wider community. Last Thursday morning there was a crew of cheerful folks here painting the Shed and the Annex. A week ago Friday someone discovered that there was a leak in the men's bathroom. By the time I found out about it, everything that needed to be done to take care of it was accomplished. That may not seem super important, but I have been in congregations where a bathroom plumbing event would have been taken straight to the pastor for him or her to fix. Which is really not helpful.

We also might overlook how God works through technology. Did you know that our live stream broadcast and YouTube recordings of worship are viewed more than 50 times each week? The folks that are watching at home, or that sit down during the week to share in worship have told me how important this ministry is for them. We've been so blessed to have Aidan Nalean-Carlson serving back there as our technology expert for the past year, and we'll thank him in just a bit. What I want you to know is that our investment in technology is serving a lot of people beyond these walls.

And speaking of the work of God beyond these walls, let me share with you about what happens in our local care facilities on the second Wednesday of every month. That is Good Shepherd's day to lead services of Holy Communion at Eastern Star, Wellington Place, and Aase Haugen. It is an extension of the worship we share here each week. This is not just something the pastor does. There is a group of wonderful people who assist with this ministry. Brooke goes to all these services and leads the singing and shares beautiful music with those gathered. Other GS members participate in those services by reading the lessons and prayers, greeting folks, and serving communion. It is a beautiful expression of the communion of saints – the body of Christ in the world. These monthly services bring JOY to the residents of the care facilities, and joy to those who lead and assist.

There are so many more ways God is at work in the sharing of our gifts in ministry. Altar Guild members come early to set the table, they bake the bread, and stay after to do the dishes and wash the linens. The Worship and Music Committee is presently working on acquiring pew pads for the sanctuary. Our dedicated Ministry Support Staff in the office do so much to keep things operating smoothly around here, and both Tristan and Erica have been a huge help to me. The Outreach and Hospitality Committee is busy getting ready for our annual Welcome Neighbors Picnic. The Flock Ministry provides leadership for worship and hospitality for our Fellowship Hour. The phenomenal leadership of the Congregation Council is such a blessing as they have been steadily guiding us during many shifts in pastoral leadership. The Education Committee is gearing up for another year of sharing God's love with our children and youth. Please pay special attention to the Education Ministry. In the next few weeks they will be coming to you, inviting you to consider God's invitation to serve these precious little ones. There are so many people in our community who live out God's love by praying for one another, sending notes of thanks and encouragement, offering rides, bringing meals ... the list goes on and on.

To conclude, I want to lift up this beautiful image from the first lesson this morning. Elijah is in the wilderness, fleeing for his life, when an angel shows up and offers him bread to eat - food to strengthen him for the further journey. This is a picture of what we do here week after week. God meets us in this place and gives us Bread to eat – Bread which strengthens us for all of the ministries I've been talking about, and so much more. Christ's own body, blessed and broken, is strengthening us for the further journey of welcoming Pr. Apil; for the further journey of sharing God's love with one another and with our neighbors; and for the further journey of one day, in God's good timing, welcoming our new "settled" pastor. Thanks be to God.