

Austin Toast, Manna and the Bread of Life

August 13, 2006

(Pentecost 10 - Year B)

John 6: 37-51

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

When I was a boy, we would drive from Houston to Austin to visit my grandfather's sisters.

These ladies were my great-aunts, and we called them Sissy and Aunt Lilla.

Visiting Aunt Lilla and Sissy in Austin was always a huge treat.

And, I know that these childhood visits to Austin, being introduced to the University of Texas campus, Longhorn football and the Co-Op to buy t-shirts, were a big factor in my decision to go to the University of Texas.

When we would drive to Austin, we would stop in the town of La Grange, which is a little over half-way between Houston and Austin.

In La Grange, we would always stop in at the Bon Ton restaurant and pick up a loaf of their homemade bread.

This homemade bread was baked at a local bakery in La Grange, and boxes full of this bread would sit by the cash register, ready to be picked up by other travelers.

When we would arrive at Aunt Lilla's house in Austin on Friday night, my brother or I would run up to her and proudly present her with a loaf of the homemade bread.

And Aunt Lilla would say:

"Oh, thank you, boys!

Well, we'll have to toast some bread for breakfast tomorrow."

And, sure enough, the next morning, I would wake up to the smell of that bread toasting.

But, Aunt Lilla did not use a toaster or an oven to toast the bread.

She would use a skillet.

She would put loads of butter into the skillet, let the butter belt, then

drop the pieces of bread into the skillet until they were golden with butter and brown on the edges.

As my brother and I got older, even though the bread came from La Grange, we called it “Austin bread” - because we always ate it in Aunt Lilla’s kitchen in Austin.

Now, as adults, we eat this Austin bread toast every year on Christmas morning.

When a member of our family travels through La Grange in the fall on the way to a football game in Austin,

They will pick up several loaves of bread and put them in the freezer, waiting for Christmas morning.

We don’t fry the bread in the skillet, like Aunt Lilla did.

But, we do toast it in the oven, with *lots and lots* of butter on it.

And, now, as a 40-something year old man,

When I put that bread into my mouth on Christmas morning,

It is much more than a piece of bread.

With that bread, I am also given so many memories of life.

Jesus says:

“I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.”

As good and as life-giving as that Austin bread toast has been for me, Somehow, I think that Jesus is talking about something much, much more.

When Jesus refers to his Jewish ancestors eating manna in the wilderness,

Jesus is talking about the Exodus.

The Exodus is when the Hebrew people were held in slavery in Egypt by the king, the Pharaoh.

Then, after 7 plagues against the Egyptians, Pharaoh let the Hebrew people go.

The Hebrew people traveled through the Red Sea, which parted in two so that they could walk through.

They then traveled through the wilderness, for 40 years, before they reached the Promised Land of Canaan.

And, so that they would have something to eat in the wilderness, every morning when they woke up, there was a flaky white bread-like substance on the ground for them to eat.

When the Hebrew people woke up and came out of their tents to find this, they said:

“Manna?”

Which, translated into English is:

“What is it?”

So, they called this daily bread “manna.”

Then, after a 40-something year long journey,

When the Hebrew people put that manna, that bread, into their mouth,

It was much more than a piece of bread.

With that bread, they were also given so many memories of life.

Jesus says:

“I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.”

As much as the memories of manna were important to the Jewish people,

As much as the memories of Austin bread are important to my family,

I can hear Jesus say to me:

“*I* am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate Austin bread in Aunt Lilla’s kitchen, yet they died.

But, I am the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and *not* die.”

The manna and the Austin bread do have life and meaning.
But, *Jesus* is the real bread of life, the only bread which will never go
away.
Jesus is the only true constant in our lives.

And, one way that Jesus remains with us, alive, and feeding us with the
bread of life,
One way that Jesus remains constant in our lives,
Is through us, through people like you and me.

We have a fancy name for these people who feed us.
We call them:
The Church.

You see, you might feel like your family, your ancestors, have all died
and you are all alone.
You might feel like your manna has stopped falling down from heaven
into your wilderness.
You might feel like you are hungry, sick, tired, depressed, bored.
But, you *will be fed* with the bread of life here, at St. Alban's.

For, I can assure you, that St. Alban's will be open for regular feedings,
each and every Sunday.
I can assure you that we will put a piece of that bread of heaven into
your hands each week.
I can assure you that you will meet Jesus here, in his Word, in his
Sacraments and in the faces of his people.

The Church is not some far away institution with bishops and priests and
holy people.
The Church is right here, right now, made up of men and women and
children and students and teachers and sinners, like you and me.
We are the Church, and in this Church, we meet and receive Jesus, who
is the bread of life, which will never die.

Jesus says:
"I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they died.
I am the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it
and not die.”

Austin bread toast brings life to me.
Yet, that bread is *not* the bread of eternal life.

Manna brought life to the Hebrew people in the wilderness.
But, manna is *not* the bread of eternal life.

Jesus is the bread of life, given to his people, through his people, the
Church.

Jesus is the bread of life, the gift of God for the people of God.

So, take this bread, in remembrance that Christ died for *you*, and
Feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2006