



BREAD OF LIFE

LENT FOR FAMILIES





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When the world feels heavy—divided and uncertain—our hearts ache, minds seek peace, and souls hunger for hope. In these moments, while many search for a way forward, the bread of life reminds us of abundance. There is enough love, grace, and hope for all. A gift that Jesus gives freely so we may give to others.

As we journey through Lent, from the wilderness to the shorelines of Galilee, we will find the sacred in the ordinary—like bread, simple yet essential. *Bread of Life*, highlights how Jesus fed people—not just their bodies but their souls—with good news, redemption, and stories of God’s kin(g)dom. From wedding feasts to eating with tax collectors to feeding thousands, people left Jesus’ presence with full hearts and bellies.

This resource invites you to come, and nourish your soul with the bread of life.

These devotions are designed for families with children, youth, and adults of all ages. Feel free to adapt the content and questions to fit your family’s needs, and remember, you don’t need to complete every activity to have a meaningful experience. We encourage you to explore the material, decide what works best for your family, and find time each week to gather for a devotion. Each devotion includes the following elements:

- **Scripture:** Look up each scripture and read it out loud together.
- **Reflection:** A devotional-like reflection that connects the scripture and theme to the Lenten season. It might make sense for you to read this section to your family, or you may want to read it yourself and see what questions or themes best resonate.
- **Discussion:** This is a chance for family discussion with open-ended questions to engage your creative minds.
- **Family Memory-Making Activity:** Take time with your family to do each week’s suggested activity. Each activity offers a way to prepare for Lent and Easter while connecting the weekly scripture reading to what you already do in your everyday lives.
- **Prayer:** Finally, each week’s devotion ends with a short prayer. You can read the prayer or invite your children to repeat after you. This prayer is a simple ritual for ending your family’s weekly devotion time. You might also choose to repeat the prayer throughout the week.
- **Audio Recordings:** Life is busy! Play the podcast of the reflection, questions, and prayer on your family drives, while making meals, settling in for the evening, or whenever works within your busy schedule. Available near the beginning of Lent.

Find it here: illstrtdm.in/BreadOfLifePodcast or by scanning this QR code.



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ASH WEDNESDAY: NOT BY BREAD ALONE

Matthew 4:1-11

Do you remember a time when you were really hungry? How did your body feel? Were you tired, grumpy, or desperate to eat anything? What's the longest you've gone without food? Take a few moments to discuss this with your family.

The Bible has lots of stories that include food. From stories of large dinner parties to stories about people who are hungry, the Bible reminds us just how important food is to each of us. Every living thing needs food to live. Without it, we are like a car without gas or a lightbulb without electricity. When we don't have enough, our hunger can tempt us to make choices that might be hurtful to ourselves and others. This might mean we respond angrily toward someone, take food that isn't ours, or even believe nobody cares about us. Maybe you can recall a time when you felt so hungry you made a poor choice.

In this story, we find Jesus hungry in the wilderness. He hasn't eaten anything for forty days and nights. Imagine going that long without food. During Jesus' hunger, the tempter came along to try and trick Jesus into turning a rock into a loaf of bread. But Jesus refused. He told the tempter, "One does not live by bread alone." What is Jesus communicating in this statement? What other things might we need to live?

The tempter continued to question Jesus and what he came to do, but Jesus kept resisting. At any point, Jesus could have made some food or given in to the tempter to prove his worth, but Jesus didn't. Throughout this story, Jesus quoted Scripture as a reminder of what he truly needs and who can provide it. He paid attention to God's voice rather than the tempter's, trusting God would meet all his needs and take care of him.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a church season that lasts forty days. Did you notice that forty days is the same amount of time Jesus spent choosing hunger in the wilderness? This Lent, we will learn about how Jesus is the bread of life, reflect on what our bodies and hearts need, practice paying attention to God's voice, and remember the ways God has provided in our lives.

Questions

1. What is the hungriest you've ever been, and how did it feel when you finally had food in your belly?
2. How might Jesus have felt when the tempter tried to trick him?
3. What are some needs we all share, and how might God meet those needs?

Prayer

Holy God, giver of breath and life, thank you for being present with us in seasons of plenty and seasons of drought. Help us turn to you in times of need for sustenance and peace. May this season of Lent be nourishing to our souls. Amen.

Sacred Space: A Lenten Journey

This Lent, your family is invited to create a sacred space to help you reflect on the bread of life and remind you of your weekly Lenten journey. Consider where your family would like to place your Lenten sacred space. We recommend placing it on your table as a centerpiece. If you don't have room at the center of your table or you'd like to be able to move your sacred space, use a tray or platter. You will add a small item related to the weekly theme to your sacred space each week.

On this Ash Wednesday, we acknowledge we all have physical and spiritual needs. We are humans, and like all of God's creatures, we experience the cycle of life and death. All living things live and die. This is called being "mortal." Ash Wednesday reminds us we are mortal—we do not live forever. If you went to church today, you might have heard a pastor say, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19) while using ashes to draw a cross on people's foreheads.

To set your sacred space, create a mud-dyed cloth as the base. Gather a white or light-colored piece of fabric, paint brushes, a small cup of water, a small amount of dirt (or brown or black paint), a candle, and matches or a lighter. You can upcycle an old pillowcase or towel. Or you might pick out a special piece of fabric or felt at a second-hand or fabric store. A large piece of white paper will also work.

Mix dirt with a little water to make mud paint, or use brown or black paint. Considering the sensory preferences of your family, use your fingers or a paintbrush as you take turns drawing a cross or other special symbols on your fabric or paper. As you do so, say, "I come from the dust of God's creation." When you wash your hands and clean up, say, "Today, we are sorry for the ways we turn towards the tempter, hurting God and each other."

Once dry, tenderly place this fabric or paper base where your sacred space will be, running your fingers over it. Say, "During Lent, we will turn towards God, working together to meet the physical and spiritual needs of all of God's creation." Add and light the candle, then say the prayer. Tend to your space together daily or as often as you like until the first week of Lent.



LENT ONE: BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:25-40

Our story starts with a crowd of people desperately looking for Jesus. Jesus had fed the crowd in an amazing way, and they were hungry for more food for their bellies and more Jesus in their hearts.

Think about how it feels to be really hungry. What noises does your stomach make? How does your tummy feel? Being hungry can be painful. It can also make us feel weak, tired, and grumpy. Now, think about how it feels to have a full stomach. Being full makes our tummies feel happy, comfy, and peaceful.

Jesus wants us to have full bellies, and he also wants us to have full hearts. Imagine what it means to have a heart that is hungry. Hungry hearts ache and long to feel loved. Now imagine what it feels like to have a heart that is full. A full heart might feel joy, belonging, thankfulness, or peace. Full hearts feel loved!

Back to our story: Jesus talked about a different kind of food. He wasn't talking about food that fills our bellies but food that fills our hearts. What is this food? We can't find it in a grocery store or cupboard because this food isn't food we actually eat. It's a person who is always with us. It's Jesus!

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." Jesus is the living bread who fills our hungry hearts with love. The love of Jesus never spoils and never runs out. We never have to wonder if there is enough bread of life at the table to feed everyone. There is enough of Jesus' love to make everyone's hearts full.

Questions

1. What is the kind of food Jesus talks about in our story today?
2. Jesus wants our bellies and our hearts to be full. What helps your heart feel full?
3. When our hearts are full of love, we can't help but share that love with others. During this season of Lent leading up to Easter, how can you share Jesus' love with others and help their hearts be full?

Prayer

God who fills bellies and hearts, no one goes hungry when we share your abundance. You are the bread of life who nurtures and sustains the world. When our bodies grow tired or our souls become weary, may we be nourished by your life-giving love. Amen.

Feeding the Body and Soul: A Bread Experience

When asked who he was, Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life” because he fed people. He fed people wherever they were. If you set up your space* on a tray or platter, bring it to where you eat.

Jesus also fed people whatever they needed. Often, that was food, but sometimes, it was wisdom and information, stories and parables, or encouragement and good news.

Gather a candle, matches or lighter, and 1–3 types of bread. You may already have bread at home, or you can buy or bake a bread you want to try. Remember, bread is a very simple food made from flour, water, and salt: crackers and flatbreads (e.g., tortilla, pita) are bread. Bread can be made from all kinds of flour (e.g., wheat, corn, nuts, seeds, etc.). Bread can also be very complex with salty or sweet ingredients or toppings. It can come in different shapes, too!

Light the candle in your sacred space. Pass out a small piece of one type of bread to each person. Don’t eat it right away! Use your other senses first to help you savor the bread completely. Look at the bread. Hold it in your hand and describe how it looks and feels. Is it soft, hard, smooth, rough, flat, fluffy? What color is it? Does it remind you of something else that’s a similar color?

Now, close your eyes and smell the bread. Describe what you smell. You may not notice it when you eat quickly, but your sense of smell works together with your taste buds to get the full flavor(s) of what you eat. Now, take a small bite and describe what your mouth feels and tastes. How does the texture change as you chew? What if you don’t chew and let the food “melt” in your mouth? How does the experience of savoring the bread differ from how you might usually eat bread?

Repeat for the remaining types of bread, comparing your observations.

Now that you’ve fed your bellies, consider how your soul needs to be fed this week. Name what feels lacking or what you need more of. Are you bored or impatient, in need of a good story? Are you in a bad mood and need some laughter? Are you worried or discouraged and need some hope and support?

Take turns helping each other “feel full” again. Tell a story or joke. Share a fact or piece of good news you heard today. Affirm someone who needs it.

Decide together what object will help you remember that Jesus is the bread of life. Will it be a leftover cracker or piece of bread from your tasting experience (if you don’t have animals that will find it!), a serving utensil to remind you of how Jesus fed people’s bodies and souls, your joke, fact, or affirmation written on a note card? Something else? Add it to your sacred space, pray, and tend to your space together daily or as often as you like until the second week of Lent.

* DIRECTIONS FOR YOUR LENTEN SACRED SPACE ARE FOUND IN THE ASH WEDNESDAY SESSION.



LENT TWO: BREAD FOR GROWTH

Luke 13:18-21

Have you ever baked something? What did you make? Do you remember what ingredients you used? Take a moment to discuss this with your family.

Every ingredient plays an important part when baking. Salt helps bring out flavor, oil can keep things from becoming too dry, and sugar helps things taste nice and sweet. When baking fluffy bread, one of the most essential ingredients is a leavening agent. This allows the bread to rise and become fluffy. There are a few kinds of leavening agents, like baking soda, baking powder, and yeast. Yeast helps bread dough bubble up, expand, and rise as it bakes. Without yeast, bread can't get big and fluffy.

In the Bible, Jesus told many parables—stories that showed people the way of God's kin(g)dom. In this story, Jesus taught in the synagogue and asked the crowd what he should compare the kin(g)dom of God to. He then shared a simple parable of a woman mixing yeast into sixty pounds of flour to make bread. That's a lot of dough! She probably couldn't eat it all herself. Who might she share her bread with? Who was she possibly making enough to share with? Her family, friends, neighbors, or people who didn't have enough food?

Jesus' story here is pretty short. We don't know what becomes of the bread. We can make an educated guess that the woman's bread met some physical needs in her community, filling empty bellies. There's a pretty good chance it also did something more. Think of a time when someone baked you a cake or another treat. Think about how it made you feel. Sharing food is a special thing that helps us spread love to others.

Love is a special ingredient in our lives that helps the kin(g)dom of God bubble up around us. Remember those leavening agents we mentioned earlier and what they do? Like yeast and other leavening agents, love expands God's kin(g)dom to everyone around us. God's kin(g)dom was never meant just for a few people. It is something to share with everyone, everywhere! Sharing love can happen in many ways, from baking someone a treat to helping someone in need. There's no shortage of ways to let love bubble up and help God's kin(g)dom expand.

Questions

1. Have you ever cooked or baked something and forgotten a vital ingredient? What was it? What happened?
2. How has someone shown you love? How did that make you feel?
3. Can you think of ways to help someone feel loved this week? How can your family share love with each other?

Prayer

God of all things big and small, love is what helps your kin(g)dom grow. Like the woman mixing yeast into bread dough, may we generously share love with one another, causing our communities to bubble up with expansive love. Amen.

Bubbling Over: Love in Color

Not all bread recipes include leaven like the one in the parable. While flatbreads are tasty, most do not get big and puffy because they don't have anything to make air bubbles in the dough. For bread to rise, it needs a leavening agent such as yeast, sourdough starter, baking powder, baking soda (bicarbonate of soda), or even a fizzy drink like beer or soda. Some leavening agents work quickly, while others work more slowly. Some create big bubbles of air, while others make little ones. And so, bread can turn out in different ways, shapes, and flavors. Amazingly, humans have created many different types of bread that look and taste so different but are made through the same natural bubble-making process!

This week, you will explore that ancient process together using one leavening agent: baking soda (bicarbonate). Gather small squares of cardstock or watercolor paper, food coloring, paint brushes, vinegar, and water to create works of art to add to your sacred space. Mix baking soda and water in a 1:1 ratio. To make multiple colors, divide your mixture into different bowls and add food coloring to the mixes to create as many paint colors as you like.

Jesus filled people's hearts with love. Use the paint, paper, and paintbrushes to create an image that represents love to you. Take turns telling a story about when you felt full of love—either to give or to receive. You can use these stories to inspire your painting or paint something as simple as a heart.

Love bubbles, grows, stretches, and spreads. Love also transforms people and their lives, much like leaven transforms dough. This is how God's kin(g)dom works. Let's watch and see what happens when we activate the baking soda. Create a 3:1 mixture of vinegar and water, and add to a spray bottle or put the mixture in a bowl with a small spoon or dropper. Apply the vinegar mixture and watch your images of love bubble, grow, stretch, spread, and transform.

When your paintings are dry, add them to your sacred space. Light your candle and say the prayer together.



LENT THREE: BREAD FOR EACH DAY

Matthew 6:9-13

Have you ever wondered where bread comes from before it arrives at the grocery store? Do you ever think about what grows to make bread? Pause for a moment to talk with your family about your wonderings.

Wheat flour is one of the most common flours used in bread making. Let's imagine a big field used to grow wheat. Farm workers prepare the soil, tilling and fertilizing the earth. Seeds are spread over the dirt and raked under the surface. Water sprinkles over the freshly planted seeds in the soil. The sun shines down on the field, and before long, wheat begins to grow.

Once the wheat grows tall and golden, farm workers cut the wheat. Wheat kernels, the dried parts of the plant, are separated from the chaff (the husk that surrounds the kernels). The wheat kernels go to a mill to be ground into a fine powder. Sifting separates the powder until we have flour.

Then the baking can begin! Yeast and other ingredients mix with the flour to make dough. The yeast causes the dough to rise. Hands knead the dough, form it into a loaf, and place it in the oven. At last, that seed in the dirt becomes bread for the table.

The Lord's Prayer says, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). God does not want anyone to be hungry, so God created our world with plants that make food to feed our bodies. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches his followers to pray for God's good ways to happen on Earth just like they happen in heaven. One of the good things God wants is for everyone to have food every day. We can be part of God's justice and good work in the world by helping others have their daily bread for today and also tomorrow. Having full tummies every day reminds everyone of God's love and makes their hearts full as well.

Questions

1. What plants do you enjoy eating?
2. Healthy food gives our bodies the energy to play, learn, and grow. What healthy food makes your body feel happy and strong?
3. God wants everyone to have food every day. How does your faith community, school, or family help people have the food they need? Can you think of any ideas to help people have enough food?

Prayer

God, our loving parent, may your reign of love and justice come to earth and rule here as it does in heaven. May we all have bread to eat each day, sharing what we have so no one is hungry. Amen.

Mapping Daily Bread

Gather around your sacred space. Every living thing must eat, and people must eat every day. We need nutrients and minerals to keep our bodies healthy. Jesus taught us to pray for our food each day when he said, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Everyone should have what they need to eat healthy food every day.

This week, add a model or map of your community to your sacred space to help remember where “daily bread” is found. If you have building blocks you can play with together, use those. If you prefer to draw together, use paper and drawing materials.

Name all the places people can get their literal “daily bread” from in your community. Where do people get and eat their food? Think about not only stores and restaurants but also any gardens or farms you know of, food banks, shelters, schools, and libraries.

Add them to your model or map as you play or draw together. Next, add places where people get the “daily bread” that Jesus also gives people to feel full. Where do people go in your community to feel full of love, purpose, connection, and goodness? Are there some places to get both kinds of “daily bread?”

When you are done building your model, choose a structure where you can get both types of “daily bread” and add it to your sacred space. Clean up the rest of your model. If you drew a map, roll it up so it fits on the tray or cut out a drawing of one place where you can get both types of “daily bread” and add it to your sacred space. Light your candle and say the prayer.



LENT FOUR: BREAD FOR SHARING

Luke 14:7-14

It can be exciting to be invited to a party. We might feel special because we were chosen by the host to be included in the fun. How do you feel when you are invited as a guest to a party? Pause and discuss with your family.

In this story, Jesus was at a banquet, noticing where people were sitting. Some people were trying to sit as close to the host as possible. In Jesus' time, seats in certain spots at the table were the most special. Everyone wanted to be in one of those seats of honor because it meant they were important. But that also meant other people had to sit in less important seats, and some weren't invited at all. So, Jesus told a parable—a story to help people understand God's ways. In the parable, Jesus described a dinner gathering for a wedding where the guests weren't trying to be in the seats of honor. Instead, they took the least important seats so others could sit in the more important positions.

Through this parable, Jesus illustrated the importance of humility. Humility reminds us that no one is more special than anyone else, which is a good thing! Being invited to the table is a gift to be cherished and enjoyed without worrying about who is most important.

Then, Jesus began another parable, this time describing what to do when you are the host of a party. He raised the idea of not inviting the usual people you might ask to a party. Now, if you were throwing a party, who might you invite? Pause and discuss with your family.

Your list probably includes names of people who make you happy and bring you joy. Those people might also invite you to their parties. However, instead of close friends and family, Jesus encourages including people who can't repay you for inviting them in the first place. Jesus illustrates hospitality, which is living generously with our lives and not expecting anything in return. Being hospitable helps us be aware of those most often excluded or forgotten in our world and look for ways to help them feel like they belong.

Humility and hospitality are really important, and we don't need to be invited to a party or host a dinner gathering to practice them. They can be a part of our usual, everyday lives. God invites us to be humble guests and generous hosts wherever we go.

Questions

1. Humility reminds us that no one is more special than anyone else. What might it look like to live with humility?
2. How might the banquet host and guests have responded about the parable Jesus told them?
3. Hospitality is living generously with our lives and not expecting anything in return. What are some ways you can extend hospitality in your everyday life?

Prayer

Welcoming God, you invite everyone to gather around your table. There is room and food for all! Wherever we go, help us remember to share bread and love with our friends, family, neighbors—everyone! Amen.

Reimagining Mealtime Practices

Gather around your sacred space. Jesus instructed us in his parables to approach gatherings with humility and to invite people who could not possibly invite us back. He showed us that God's table is everyone's table.

Adults, close your eyes and take a moment to think about what an average dinner was like in your home when you were about ten years old. Describe the scene to the rest of your family: What was the shape of the table? Where did people sit? What type of food was served, and in what order? Who was there? What was the mood like? What rituals did you have? Were there expectations for what adults or children should do?

Name one or two things you learned implicitly or explicitly about gender or other family roles, hospitality, generosity or scarcity, inclusion or exclusion, or other values. Name one dinner practice from your family of origin you have continued or want to begin practicing at your table. Name one dinner practice you stopped practicing or would like to stop practicing. Invite the children into this conversation: Based on what you heard the grown-ups share, what mealtime practices would you like to add, change, or take away so your table and mealtimes reflect a more Christ-like experience?

Choose an item from your dinner table that represents this change you are committing to make as a family and add it to your sacred space. Light your candle and say the prayer.



LENT FIVE: BREAD FOR COMMUNITY

Luke 19:1-10

Have you ever felt like an outsider who didn't belong? What was that like? Pause and discuss with your family.

In our story, we meet a man named Zacchaeus who felt that way. People did not like Zacchaeus because he worked as a tax collector, gathering money to give to Rome from the people he lived among. Many people hated tax collectors and viewed them as traitors to Israel. They also teased Zacchaeus for being short.

The story about Zacchaeus meeting Jesus is a funny one. When Zacchaeus heard the famous teacher was coming through town, he was so excited to see Jesus! But because he was short, he needed to find a way to see Jesus above the crowds. So what did Zacchaeus do? He climbed a tree, of course! Imagine Zacchaeus's surprise when Jesus walked by, looked up at him perched in the tree, and told him to come down. Then Jesus announced to Zacchaeus and the crowds he would be going to Zacchaeus's house. What an unexpected kindness!

The people in the crowd were also surprised at Jesus' kindness. They wondered, and even grumbled: Why would Jesus want to visit and eat with a person like Zacchaeus? If Jesus was going to eat with someone, shouldn't it be someone holy and loyal to Israel? Why would Jesus want to spend time with this traitor?

Jesus ate meals with many different kinds of people. Sharing a meal with different people helps us understand one another better and discover new friendships. We see how Jesus' generosity changed Zacchaeus. Realizing his actions harmed people, Zacchaeus gave away half of everything he owned to people in need and promised to give even more to those he had taken too much money from. Zacchaeus showed unexpected generosity by sharing with those who needed it most. We can follow Jesus' example, too.

Questions

1. Jesus and Zacchaeus met each other in a funny way. What happened when they met?
2. Zacchaeus felt like an outsider who didn't belong. Jesus included Zacchaeus by eating a meal with him. How can we help people feel included?
3. Zacchaeus had more than he needed. Generosity led him to share with others. In what ways do you or your faith community share with others?

Prayer

God of community, through Jesus, you have shown us the life-changing power of a meal shared with others. With courage and compassion, may we notice those around us feeling lonely or left out and practice welcoming and including them. Amen.

Sacred Moments of Laughter

Gather around your sacred space. As you do, talk about how the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is funny. Humor is one way humans connect and grow relationships. Laughter fills and feeds us emotionally. Do you have a funny story to tell about your day? Share it. Do you know a funny joke? Tell it, or look one up. Listen to your family's laughter. A lot of laughter is voluntary—we hear, see, or experience something, and our brain makes a quick choice about whether we laugh or not. But there is another kind of laughter that's similar to some crying—involuntary and spontaneous. It happens when your body is so full of a feeling like delight or joy that it bubbles out. Often, this kind of laughter is hard to stop or control—it has to come out. This is like the generosity that poured out of Zacchaeus.

Play a game called “Honey I Love You” with your family. In this game, one person is “it” and tries to make another person laugh only by asking questions. The person who is “it” can use silly voices or ask funny questions, but cannot touch the other person. If the person laughs while responding, “Honey, I love you, but I just can't smile,” they become “it” next.

Write down a joke or a funny story to add to your Lenten sacred space. Light your candle and say the prayer.



HOLY WEEK: BREAD FOR THE ROAD

John 12:12-16, Luke 19:28-40, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 23:26-56

When Jesus sat down to eat dinner with his disciples, his heart was probably full of mixed emotions. Earlier that week, he had been welcomed into Jerusalem with people praising him like a king. People were celebrating his triumphant entry into Jerusalem by throwing down their cloaks, waving palm branches in the air, praising God, and proclaiming Jesus as king at the top of their lungs! Even though the empire was furious, the crowd kept doing this because people believed Jesus was their savior. The good news of Jesus sustained them in ways the empire never could.

Jesus did wonderful things, but he also knew he was about to be betrayed by one of his closest friends and arrested before finally being put to death on a cross. Jesus worked to make the world a better place, but that angered the people in power because he challenged them and the systems from which they got their power. What might Jesus have felt in this moment? Pause and talk about this with your family.

Even though Jesus knew how difficult the coming days would be, he knew it would be important to endure them. So, during this dinner gathering, he took bread and broke it, telling his disciples, "This is my body." The disciples were puzzled. What did Jesus mean? For them and for us today, food is an important reminder of the nourishment we all need.

As they ate, Jesus encouraged his disciples to remember him every time they sat down for a meal. This practice, which is called the Lord's Supper, communion, or the Eucharist, is something we still do today. It is a time to remember Jesus as the bread of life for us all. Jesus is the nourishment for everyone, everywhere, and just like the disciples, we are invited to remember his gift of life to us. Anytime we sit down for a meal, have a snack, or even feel hungry, we can use this practice to remember how he provides for us whenever we are in need.

Questions

1. How did Jesus help the disciples think about his body and life as a source of nourishment?
2. What words or parts of communion do you like most and why?
3. How can you and your family practice remembering Jesus as the bread of life?

Prayer

God who goes with us, give us bread for the journey. The road that leads to justice is long, and the path of love can be exhausting. When we are hungry, nourish us. When we are tired, sustain us. Amen.

Agape Feast: Sharing the Bread of Life

Gather around your sacred space. This day marks the beginning of the final journey. But Jesus cannot endure this long road without both the breaking of bread with his disciples and the deep understanding that he is the bread of life. Eating and drinking was Jesus' way of inspiring us to reflect on his life and message. When Jesus died, it was a sad day. His disciples, family, and friends felt helpless watching Jesus suffer. Sometimes, suffering and pain do not make sense. Holy Week reminds us to be sad and angry when people are treated poorly. But even though the "bread of life" was broken on Good Friday and mourned on Holy Saturday, that bread would go on to feed the world.

An Agape Feast or Love Feast is a tradition that began in biblical times when Christians came together (usually around a table) to share food, stories, and songs. *Agape* means love—the kind of love between siblings. It is a love that values the well-being of people you like and those you do not even know. You love them simply because they are beloved children of God.

Sometimes, an Agape Feast might look like a celebration of communion, but different elements are used instead of bread and juice. A pastor does not need to be present; the time is meant for people to connect and grow their relationships. Testimonials are often shared. Testimonials are stories about how God shows up for people.

Hold an Agape Feast around a table or in a circle. It can be at a mealtime or a separate time. Use bread and juice as you would in communion or any food and drink you'd like. You can use something you are already serving at your mealtime or a dessert and hot tea at the end. Take turns serving the person to your left, offering them a piece of the "bread of life." Then, pour a drink or offer them the "cup of life" to dip their "bread" into. Share a testimonial of how God has shown up in your life when you have received the "bread" or the "cup of life." When everyone has been served and shared, sing *Bread of Life* or another song together.

Add a dish or serving utensil you used during your Agape Feast to your Lenten sacred space. Light your candle and say the prayer.



EASTER: BREAD FOR FEASTING

John 20:11-18, 21:1-17

Throughout our Lenten season, we've been learning about bread. Bread makes a special appearance at many Easter meals, sometimes as pastries or dinner rolls. Close your eyes and picture a special Easter meal you've had—maybe an Easter breakfast or dinner. What smells and tastes do you recall? Pause and discuss with your family.

Did you know that after Jesus rose back to life, he made a special breakfast for his disciples? After appearing to Mary Magdalene and some disciples near the tomb he had been buried in, Jesus found the disciples on a lake trying to catch fish. They hadn't caught any all night, so Jesus yelled across the water at them to throw their net on the other side of the boat. Suddenly, their nets overflowed with fish! Immediately, Simon Peter recognized it was Jesus on the shore, jumped off the boat, and swam to Jesus. The other disciples rowed to shore and found Jesus preparing a breakfast of fish roasted over a fire and, of course, bread.

During this special breakfast, Jesus once again broke the bread and shared a meal with his disciples. Not long before that moment, they had eaten together at the Last Supper. The days that followed that very special meal had been filled with sadness, fear, and confusion when Jesus died on the cross. Then something amazing happened. The tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive! Now here they were, eating bread together with Jesus again. They weren't afraid or sad any longer. Now, their hearts were filled with joy and hope.

Bread made a special appearance throughout Jesus' ministry, but Jesus did so much more than fill people's tummies. Jesus is the bread of life who fills people's hearts.

After eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter three times to feed his sheep. Jesus wanted him to continue to feed people with the bread of life—the good news about Jesus. Jesus wants his followers today to continue the mission of caring for people's physical and spiritual needs. Jesus wants the feast to continue!

Questions

1. What stories do you remember about Jesus feeding people or having meals together?
2. What are some ways your family celebrates with food? Take a moment to give thanks for the special food and special people in your life.
3. The good news of Easter is that in Jesus, we have everlasting life and unending love. How can you help fill people's hearts with the good news about Jesus?

Prayer

God, you are alive! Like the sun rising into day or a loaf of bread rising as it bakes, you rise to greet us each morning with love. Let's celebrate with a never-ending feast, inviting everyone to experience your never-ending love! Amen.

Feeding Others Beyond Lent

Gather around your sacred space. The story of Easter shows us that not even death could keep Jesus from continuing to feed others. Jesus had a beachside breakfast barbecue to welcome and nourish his followers, the exhausted fishermen. Then, when Jesus asked Simon Peter three times to feed his sheep, Jesus emphasized that we are supposed to continue providing and being the “bread of life” even now, long after he ascended to heaven.

Lent might be over, but our job of feeding others and sharing the “bread of life” is not. With your family, make a plan to feed others three ways or times during Eastertide (the fifty days that follow Easter Sunday, ending with Pentecost). Think back to the stories you heard over Lent, including this week. Could you surprise someone with breakfast? Or plan a breakfast picnic? Volunteer to provide a meal at a shelter? Help in a community garden? Cheer someone up? Bake bread or make art to give to someone? Invite someone new to a meal at your home? Or visit and learn from a person or place on your map that provides “daily bread” to your community?

Write down and add your plan to your Lenten sacred space. Light your candle and say the prayer.

Keep and tend to your sacred space for as long as you like—until you’ve completed your plan for being or providing the “bread of life” for others or through Eastertide. If you enjoyed this practice, you can remove items and add new ones depending on the liturgical season or your family’s weekly life events and reflections.



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