

**PENTECOST:  
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 14  
August 9, 2009**

**1 Kings 19:4-8  
Psalm 34:1-8  
Ephesians 4:25—5:2  
John 6:35, 41-51**

**The Bread of Life**

Following two miracles and two separate attempts to find Jesus, this week's Gospel reading is framed by two Christological statements that define Jesus as the "Bread of Life" and the "Living Bread." In the book of Exodus (chapters 16 and 17), Moses intercedes for the Israelites, and God sustains them in the desert with bread from heaven and water from a rock. In today's Old Testament reading from 1 Kings 19, an angel points out to Elijah "a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water" (verse 6, *NRSV*) that had miraculously materialized while he was despairing of life. In both cases, God provides the bread that ensures the recipients' survival.

The Bread of Life in John's Gospel has the same origin, but goes far beyond mere survival. Identified with Jesus, who was sent by his Father, the Living Bread confers eternal life upon those who believe in him. Belief in Jesus is described as a sequence of physical acts that bring people closer to him as they gain knowledge of his message. The text mentions seeing and hearing, coming to Jesus without fear of being driven away, and eating.

In this context, eating the Bread of Life appears to be a metaphor for absorbing God's Word and echoes the phrase from Deuteronomy quoted by Jesus when he was tempted: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, *NRSV*). At the very end of the Gospel reading, in verse 51, Jesus speaks of the bread as his flesh, not his body, using a phrase that recalls the beginning of John's Gospel: "And the Word became flesh" (1:14, *NRSV*).

In addition to being a metaphor for the divine revelation, the Bread of Life also points to the Eucharistic bread, although less clearly in today's reading than in verses 52-58 that follow. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus institutes the Eucharist while celebrating the Passover with his disciples. In John's Gospel, the washing of the disciples' feet takes place at the meal he shared with his disciples on the night of his betrayal (13:1-20), and the Eucharist is suggested in Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life.

Through the feast of the Eucharist, we are accepting the new agreement God makes with us (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). As we reflect on Jesus as the Bread of Life, we are reminded that, when we accept him, we are indeed partakers of the Bread of Life which sustains us for all eternity.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Dr. Liana Lupas, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Curator of the Library and Scripture Collection.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Iceland –**

With thanks to God for the new translation of the Icelandic Bible and with prayers for programs to develop Bible reading and growing knowledge of a Christian heritage;

**Denmark** – With thanks to God for the continued success of the *Good Samaritan* AIDS projects in countries like Sierra Leone and Swaziland, and with prayers for Bible work in Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and with prayers that educational Scripture material will be successful;

**Norway** – With prayers for translation projects and that the revision of the Bible in Norwegian and New Norwegian will be completed in 2009; Southern Sami is a language endangered by a scarcity of speakers and a lack of literature, and the Northern Sami Old Testament has to unite three dialects into one language;

**Finland** – With thanks to God for the generosity of donors and for the dedication of the funds on the occasion of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mikael Agricola, the first Bible translator in Finnish, and with prayers for HIV and AIDS work in Cote d'Ivoire, and for translation projects in Northern Sami and other Finno-Ugric languages in partnership with IBT Helsinki; **Sweden** – With thanks to God for the mission to have the Bible translated, well known and used, and with prayers for the developing of the Bible Society's domestic work with new staff members and for the ability to give more support to international projects.

**Activity Corner:** "Bread of Life" Gathering

Supplies needed: Bible; newsprint; marker; pens or pencils; pattern in the shape of a slice of bread; 8-1/2" x 11" construction paper (assorted colors); scissors.

Encourage members of your household to find out information on various types of breads, especially those that are prepared in other parts of the world. Using newsprint, create a chart, listing the country and the type of bread unique to that country. Discuss why bread is such a staple food. Why does Jesus refer to himself as the "Bread of Life" or "Living Bread"? Invite people to a "Bread of Life" gathering and serve various types of bread. For the invitations, fold a sheet of construction paper in half (so it measures 8-1/2" x 5-1/2") and trace and cut out a "slice of bread," keeping one side of the "bread" against the fold. On the front, copy Psalm 34:8a and on the inside write the date, time, and place of the gathering. At the gathering, read Psalm 34:1-8 as a litany, asking everyone to respond with the words of verse 1 after the leader reads each of the remaining seven verses. (You may wish to copy the words to verse 1 on a sheet of newsprint so that everyone can refer to it.) Conclude by singing "O Living Bread from Heaven," or "Break Now the Bread of Life," or one of your favorite praise hymns.