

6th August 2023 – PLYMOUTH

Our daily bread, led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. **INTRO MUSIC** 'Lammas', Lisa Thiel

<https://youtu.be/ph4GEyHfENE>

2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHT**

Welcome to you all. You are welcome whoever you are, and however you're feeling right now. Thank you for being here, for making the effort to join us on this Sunday morning. You are welcome here today, just as you are.

The opening music was called 'Lammas', by Lisa Thiel. The pagan festival of Lammas (or Lughnasadh) was on 1st August, just a few days ago. Lammas is one of the so-called 'quarter' Celtic festivals, the others being Beltane, Samhain and Imbolc. Lammas marks the first harvest of the year – the bringing in of the wheat and the making of the first loaf. There was traditionally reverence and ritual surrounding this first grain harvest – it was religious in the original meaning of that word, which was 'to bind' or 'form a bond'. It bound people together and with the cycles of nature. The first sheaf of corn in particular was considered to be supremely important. It was thought to produce the first (and the best) seeds and provided assurance of future harvests. It would be ceremonially cut at dawn, winnowed, ground and baked into special Harvest Bread which was then shared by the community in thanks.

And so the theme of our service today is inspired by Lammas, but I have called it 'Our daily bread'.

Let's begin our service, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. (Do please light one with me if you are able to do so.)

LIGHT CHALICE

May this flame be a symbol of all that nourishes and sustains us, the light within and without.

3. **OPENING WORDS/PRAYER**

Table Blessing, Jan Richardson, a Christian writer but this blessing captures something of communion as well as the pagan rites of Lammas or any other religious festival in which food is shared and hospitality is offered. It speaks to the sacred nature of the act itself.

To your table
you bid us come.
You have set the places,
you have poured the wine,
and there is always room,
you say,
for one more.
And so we come.
From the streets
and from the alleys
we come.
From the deserts
and from the hills
we come.
From the ravages of poverty
and from the palaces of privilege
we come.
Running,
limping,
carried,
we come.
We are bloodied with our wars,
we are wearied with our wounds,

we carry our dead within us,
and we reckon with their ghosts.
We hold the seeds of healing,
we dream of a new creation,
we know the things
that make for peace,
and we struggle to give them wings.
And yet, to your table
we come.
Hungering for your bread,
we come;
thirsting for your wine,
we come;
singing your song
in every language,
speaking your name
in every tongue,
in conflict and in communion,
in discord and in desire,
we come,
O God of Wisdom,
we come.

4. **1st Hymn 176 (G) Come together in love**

O come together in truth:
O come together in peace;
O come together in joy and sharing,
come together in knowing and caring;
come together,
O come together,
O come together in love.

We come together in search
of new beginnings for all,
where understanding and trust surround us –
gone the hate and fear that bound us;
come together,
O come together,
O come together in love.
Words and music by Dorothy Grover

5. STORY

The first reading is from the book 'Sleeping with bread', written by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn. The book is actually about a form of Ignatian prayer called the examen, but the writers begin with the following short story...

During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much they could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, "Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow."

6. READING by Mark Belletini

Sonata for Voice and Silence Meditations

The earth.
One planet.
Round, global,
so that when you trace its shape

with your finger,
you end up where you started. It's one. It's whole.
All the dotted lines we draw on our maps
of this globe are just that, dotted lines.
They smear easily.
Oceans can be crossed.
Even the desert can be crossed.
The grain that grows on one side of the border
tastes just as good as the grain on the other side.
Moreover, bread made from rice is just as nourishing
to body and spirit as bread made from corn,
or spelt or teff or wheat or barley.
There is no superior land, no chosen site,
no divine destiny falling on any one nation
who draws those dotted lines just so.
There is only one earth we all share,
we, the living, with all else that lives
and does not live.
Everything,
everything, for good or ill,
is part of the shared whole:
sky, earth, song, words and now, this silence.

7. REFLECTION

We come now to a time of reflection. I mentioned earlier the Ignatian Spirituality practice of the Examen. It is a daily practice that invites us to spend time in contemplation of two opposing questions.

Today I invite you to spend time in a short prayerful silence as you contemplate this pair of questions...

1. 'What is it that most sustains me?'

2. 'What is it that most depletes me?'

You may like to light a candle and share something that nourishes you.

8. **INTERLUDE:** 'Folk fantasy on Brother James' Air', by Our Daily Bread
<https://youtu.be/8nnNB119RKc>

2nd Hymn 184 (G) The best things

I learned it in the meadow path,
I learned it on the mountain stairs –
the best things any mortal hath
are those which every mortal shares.

The air we breathe, the sky, the breeze,
the light without us and within;
life with its unlocked treasures,
God's riches, are for all to win.

The grass is softer to my tread
because it rests unnumbered feet;
sweeter to me the wild rose red
because she makes the whole world sweet.

Wealth won by others' poverty –
not such be mine! Let me be blest
only in what they share with me,
and what I share with all the rest.

We learn it in the meadow path,
we learn it on the mountain stairs –
the best things any mortal hath
are those which every mortal shares.

Music John Ambrose Lloyd, words Lucy Larcom

9. ADDRESS

The image of orphaned children in wartime being given bread to hold at night to help them sleep is such a poignant one. The authors don't say exactly when or where this happened, but the story evokes a touching human vulnerability matched by an equally touching human kindness. It speaks clearly to our deep need for a sense of home, however we understand that; to the feeling of having at least some security and a degree of peace, even in the most emotionally challenging and difficult times.

This idea of returning again and again to the sustenance of bread reverberates through *Lammas*, with its focus on the repeating cycles of seasons, of harvesting the wheat that has been planted, transforming it into life giving food, and celebrating the promise of more to come the following year.

But the metaphor of bread as more than just literal food, but also a symbol of spiritual sustenance resonates through Christianity. In *John 6: 35* Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.*" Clearly he's not talking simply about eating and drinking, but about spiritual fulfilment.

Bread as a reliable source of sustenance is such an ingrained idea (if you'll excuse the pun), it is such a powerful and universally understood symbol of nurture and nourishment, that Jesus calls himself 'the bread of life'. His teachings, and the spiritual nourishment he offers and points towards, allow those who follow him to feel safe and held.

And likewise, in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, we hear the familiar line 'Give us this day our daily bread', and we know that yes, it's about the food we need to survive, but also more than that. It's about the spiritual nourishment we also need to thrive.

How did bread of all things become this embodiment of nurture and nourishment? In fact, how on earth did bread even come to be? It's not as though grains of wheat look very promising as a food.

The evolution of wheat is too complex – and uncertain – to go into, but I did delve into it far enough to discover something new (to me anyway) which I found fascinating. You may know that the peak of the Ice Age was around 20,000 years ago, but by about 15,000 to 12,000 years ago it was drawing to an end, and more temperate-loving plants and mammals, including ourselves, became able to thrive and multiply once again. Grasses – including wild wheat and barley - would have become plentiful at that time and would have been a relatively easy-to-find and reliable supplement to other foods, if nothing else. But then there followed another global cold snap (I say 'snap', it lasted a good millennium) which once again put severe restriction on life and on resources of food. However, it seems that the wild grasses continued to grow and our ancestors – in the absence of much else – even began to be cultivate them. By the time this cold period was over, grass grains had established themselves as a reliable form of sustenance. They had endured as a source of nourishment, *even through the tough times*, and perhaps that was key. Do we even today remember this somewhere deep in our collective psyche? And has this helped to give bread its symbolism?

After all it is sustenance that endures through challenging times that feels core to understanding what gives us spiritual nourishment – our daily 'bread' in that figurative sense. After all there are plenty of ways we can spend our time enjoyably, of course. But what I sense most of us are looking is not so much the quick fixes and pleasant distractions, though they have their place, but the deeper-rooted and more dependable sources of nourishment that will see us through, even through times of adversity. They are the 'bread' we can hold on to when all else fails.

I'm always amazed by the human spirit of imagination and curiosity, our extraordinary ingenuity and resourcefulness. Of course they get us into trouble at times, but nevertheless these gifts that enable us to adapt, experiment and discover ways to survive and even flourish in what often appear to be unpromising circumstances and quite incredible. While we have been given – and still are given – so much – sunlight, water, earth, air, bounteous gifts to harvest – at our human best we are also able to work with the divine, to co-create and innovate in astonishing ways.

I don't think anyone quite knows how the first bread came to be made from those husky little grains of wheat and barley, but we can be sure it took courage to embrace possibility where there seemed little reason to hope; willingness to try and to fail, again and again; an unstoppable determination to keep learning and to keep surviving; and some kind of faith, or vision, deep in our core that continues to hope even when all seems hopeless. We might think of that as the divine spark within, the light, or the spirit of God that moves us.

What nourishes each of us on our journey through life will be particular to us, as we've heard – and yet also so much will be universal. We humans search for meaning and find it in our own particular relationships, interests and passions, but broadly we all find nourishment – our daily bread – in friendship, in community, in family, in creativity, in nature and in ideas that encourage and inspire us. And sometimes – maybe only in desperation – we discover what sustains us in the most unlikely of places.

In other words, we seek and find nourishment in the depths of things, which is another way of saying that we find it in God, in whom we live and move and have our being. We may not go to bed each night literally clutching a piece of bread for our comfort and security, but we may indeed take with us a profound gratitude for our blessings and an awareness that, for its troubles here on earth, the universe still shimmers with light and love and possibility, and that we are wholly a part of it.

May you seek and find your daily bread today, tomorrow and every day.

Amen

10. THIRD HYMN 271 (G) Give thanks

Give thanks for the corn and the wheat that are reaped,
for labour well done and the barns that are heaped,
for the sun and the dew and the sweet honeycomb,
for the rose and the song and the harvest brought home.

Give thanks for the commerce and wealth of our land,
for cunning and strength of the hard-working hand,
for the beauty our artists and poets have wrought,
for the hope and affection our friendships have brought.

Give thanks for the homes that with kindness are blessed,
for seasons of plenty and well-deserved rest,
for our country extending from sea unto sea,
for the ways that have made it a land for the free.

English traditional melody, author unknown.

11. CLOSING WORDS Words by Cliff Reed

When the turtle doves are purring
in the hedgerow and the copse;
and a gentle breeze is playing
over fields and green tree tops;

When the white clouds in the blue sky
cast cool shadows on the earth,
and the meadow grass is stirring,
swaying to the Spirit's breath;

When, above, the swifts are wheeling
and, below, the wise ants toil,

garnering the bounteous harvest
of the sun- and rain-drenched soil;

Souls are touched and, for a moment,
even sorrow's burden lifts;
we give thanks for all these blessings,
all the summer's countless gifts.

12. CLOSING MUSIC 'Corn rigs are bonny', setting by Barsanti

<https://youtu.be/11oKK0w-RAI>

*(inspired by my recent trip to Merrivale on Dartmoor – people who lived around 3000
years ago)*