

Homily Bread Communion

By Reverend Jane Smith, Channing Memorial Church, Ellicott City MD, Nov 8, 2019

On this morning of Bread Communion I am steeped in gratitude. Reflecting on bread, on grains on this season of thanksgiving and gratitude, what comes to my mind is Pillsbury bleached all-purpose flour. Every summer growing up, my sister, father and I would load up in my dad's car and make the long trip to Guelph, Ontario to visit my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Each time we stumbled out of that car and crossed the threshold of the house, we were met with what all of us lovingly called "Grandma cookies." Butterscotch cookies, chocolate coconut cookies, fudgy squares with marshmallows, macaroons – piles of cookies! And we were grateful. These cookies were baked with love, these cookies were delicious, and these cookies were comforting because they were associated with love and family. Now, my grandmother is 99 and has not been able to bake for years. But this tradition continues, as her children and grandchildren now bake those very same cookies for her, to lift up these memories and to lift up our gratitude and to lift up our love. We each have these recipes now, and these cookies will continue to warm the hearts and souls of children for generations. To be grateful to be together, and grateful for family, and grateful for the love that continues through the generations.

I love those memories that permeate different dishes in different families. Food is different for each culture; each culture has connection with their food and ritual around food. What crop is indigenous to the area? What role does food play in religion? What significance does a society place on various dishes? What food is seen as healing? All of these elements are passed down through the generations through story, stories repeated through sharing food, through sharing sustenance. Often, in the form of grains. Whether bread or another dish, grains have kept generations nourished and productive. Grains play roles in religions – the story of Passover in Judaism, of the eucharist in Christianity. And woven into

each culture are these unique stories of individual families, just like we have brought with us today.

Breads ripe with meaning, rice dishes steeped with story, matzah bursting with cultural history and family lore. And in each one of these stories, may we find gratitude for what has come before us.

Perhaps we have some cornbread from the American south that was a staple of our grandparents, and we are grateful for that corn that helped them through financial hardship. Perhaps we bring sticky buns from a favorite bakery, and we are grateful for Saturday mornings brought to life munching on that gooey sweetness! Each dish has its own story, its own meaning, its own history. And, in the spirit of gratitude, in the spirit of connecting to all of that which came before, we brought all these stories here with us today! For all of this – these dishes and their stories – let us be grateful. For the opportunity to share sustenance and live in beloved community, let us celebrate gratitude. For this community of which we are a part, for our family and loved ones, for stories of generations past, for stories we are yet to tell, and for all of those tasty grains that sustain our lives and our livelihoods, let us be grateful.

And as we lift up gratitude, let us lift up gratitude for the land – the land that provides us these grains and the land that we depend on for sustenance and for life. Those browning fields of wheat stretched across the Midwest, stalks, stems and leaves blowing in the wind, mingling with dirt and rain and bugs. Or flooded paddy fields where rice is grown – land saturated with water for this semi-aquatic crop, reflecting the sky above it in a stunning feat of nature. To offer thanks to this land which offers us life.

We bring our own stories with us here today with the spirit of community as many of us bring a grain dish from our own homes; to come here and become something bigger than ourselves; to share food, to share sustenance, to share stories from our lives. For sharing these breads is a holy affair – bringing those grains that each have a unique story, baked with care and wrapped in plastic or cloth and brought here to be shared with others in the community – what a beautiful, meaningful tradition. We are a

beloved community, bigger than our individual selves, sharing in a tangible way our histories, gathering together in gratitude for this beloved and sacred act of sharing grains.

As we take time to focus on gratitude and this beloved community, how can we share this gratitude with others? Let our gratitude become generosity as we share our bounties with the world. Let us bend the road with generosity, offering to others the bounties we have ourselves, even if it is a simple smile. Let us take time today to reflect on those tangible things we can do to help those who are struggling during these months where the attention of so many is on gratitude – let us turn this gratitude into generosity, offering food, offering song, offering community, and offering love.

Let us all reflect with gratitude that we are here, together, today. Let us be grateful for this shared food so graciously offered, these grain dishes brought here today in the spirit of community and the spirit of love and the spirit of sharing. Let us be grateful for this faith community of which we are all a part; that allows us to be a part of something much bigger than our individual selves. Let us be grateful for this day, and this moment, and carry this gratitude out with us into the world to help others, and to keep this feeling in our hearts for the days, weeks, and months to come. May it be so, and Amen.