

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 23, 2018

*Micah 3:2-5a: **“As You Prepare for Christmas,
Think on This... “Bread from the House of Bread”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As most all of us know, Christ was born in Bethlehem. The word "Bethlehem" literally means in the Hebrew: "The House of Bread." Jesus was not born in the house of royalty, or the house of riches, or the house of celebrity. Jesus was not born in the great city of Jerusalem, or in Rome, or in Athens or Alexandria. For that matter he was not born in any political, commercial, cultural, educational, or socially significant city of the day. When Micah, the Old Testament prophet, foretold the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, he purposely emphasized its lack of significance to the world: "But you, O Bethlehem (House of Bread) . . . who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days (Micah 5:2)." Jesus, "the bread of life" will come from the house of bread - Bethlehem.

There's a lot we can say about bread. It is often a metaphor for basic necessities and living conditions in general. The English word "lord" comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning "bread keeper." In our day, we might speak of "putting bread on the table" to mean anything we eat. And, for those of us who lived in the seventies, when someone asked you for some "bread," they were referring to money. A remarkable or revolutionary innovation is often called "the next best thing since sliced bread." Most significant is what we say in the Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Luther's *Small Catechism* asks, "What is meant by daily bread? [The Answer] Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body . . ."

In comparison with all of the things that one could eat, bread is considered basic or common. Some people refuse to eat bread when there is a large meal. They don't want to fill up on common bread and miss everything else. Bethlehem was a common, little town that had been appointed as the birth place of the Savior of the world. You can't get bigger than that! Jesus is the thing we need. **Bread from the House of Bread.** May God enable us to chose "the good portion," and may it not be taken away.

As is often the case in the Bible, we are moved from physical stuff to the spiritual. The spiritual is always higher and more important. All that has been made has been made in order to help us understand our relationship with God. One place where we see this on display is in the book of Ruth. I think you will be surprised at how the book of Ruth helps us to understand Jesus as **Bread from the House of Bread.** For starters, the book begins and ends in the town of Bethlehem. Secondly, the center of the book is on the theme of redemption, and redemption means to be bought back from loss. Thirdly, God will bring Ruth, a Moabite woman, to the town of Bethlehem - the house of bread - in order to be a grandmother of the true bread of life, Jesus Christ our Lord.

At the beginning of the book of Ruth, an Israelite family leaves the house of bread - the little town of Bethlehem - to go to the land of Moab. The reason for this is that there is a famine in Israel - there is a lack of bread. We read:

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name

of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

And here is where all of the trouble begins. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons leave the land of God's promise to live in the unbelieving, idolatrous land of Moab. Their sin is against the first commandment. They are not looking to God for their bread. They leave the house of bread for another food. Elimelech dies. The two sons marry Moabite women - one of them Ruth. Then, the two sons die.

God's grace is shown in contrast to these sins. Even though Elimelech took his family out of Israel only to find death, God brought Naomi back to the house of bread by his divine grace. In addition to this, God mercifully converts Ruth and makes her into a comfort for Naomi. When they return to the house of bread - Bethlehem - it is harvest time, and Ruth begins to glean in Boaz's field. Boaz notices the destitution of Ruth and Naomi, the humility and faith of Ruth, and willingly places himself in the position of a redeemer to buy back the land of Elimelech. He then proceeds to marry Ruth and, by doing so, saves her and Naomi from utter ruin. The book then closes with Boaz and Ruth having a son by the name of Obed, who happens to be the father of king David, who is the ancestor of Jesus the King of kings.

As you can see, the book of Ruth starts off with famine of both body and spirit, full of sin and sorrow, but ends with food in the field of Boaz, redemption, and the birth of a son from the house of bread who will become the grandfather of the bread of life. Naomi and Ruth are filled in both body and spirit. When Ruth gave birth to her son, we are told: "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.'"

Now, fast forward to the time of Jesus. There is a spiritual famine throughout all Israel. Apart from God there is always such a famine. The people are spiritually famished. We are by nature this way. But into this spiritual famine comes the bread of life born in the house of bread. "And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth."

And this baby would grow up into a man. And, he would one day say, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst (John 6:35)." He would become the redeemer of the world. And in his suffering and death, there would peace on earth to whom his favor rests. One more time, fast-forward now to 2018. Is there not a spiritual famine to this very day? What shall we do? Shall we leave the house of bread to chase after bread somewhere else as so many people do today? By no means! May God bring us to the field of our redeemer who will buy us as his own, save us from utter ruin, make us into his eternal companion, and give us the unending joy of the birth of

a new heaven and new earth! Our bread is to be found nowhere else. We cannot find true bread in political, social, and cultural solutions. What is crooked about the down here cannot be straightened. Besides, the kingdom of our Lord is not of this world. Heaven in our home!

God's one and only Son - the bread of life from the house of bread is the only thing that will satisfy all of our wants and desires. Above our request for God to give us our daily bread, we realize that our daily bread is utterly meaningless apart from he who is our bread forever. As Jesus says,

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the 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. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh (John 6:47-51).

Small things like Bethlehem and Ruth can be "game changers" can't they? Leaving the house of bread to chase after bread in another land will ultimately lead to death and sorrow! Going back to Bethlehem and one man by the name of Boaz changes it all as he redeems the land, marries Ruth, and has a child who will lead to king David and to Joseph and to Jesus! Are there "game changers" in your life? Certainly there are! Look at how the Lord got you here. And we should thank God for all of these, as they lead us to the bread of the cross and resurrection. We should thank God for the little things, the little town of Bethlehem, and all of those details that lead us down the road to the spiritual food that satisfies forever.

As Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6)." Who are the blessed? G. J. Albrecht writes:

The know the Lord Jesus as the Bread of Life, and they drink deeply of the living water that he provides. In other words, they faithfully use the means of grace, the gospel of Christ in Word and sacrament. They like to make the Word of God a part of their daily routine. They love to assemble regularly with there fellow believers to hear God's Word proclaimed. They do not casually pass up opportunities to receive the Lord's Supper, and they live with daily appreciation of the blessing of their baptism, thus continuing to be blessed and strengthened by their covenant of grace the Lord made with them through Baptism. They know that God forgives all their sins day by day and that they will stand among the righteous on Christ's right hand on the day of judgment.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott