

Nothing is ordinary

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This is a good week for preachers to share a little good-natured griping about the seemingly endless stream of bread-centered (panecentric?) gospel readings. Ask them to stop you if they've heard this one before. Ask them if it's just you, or if there's an echo in the room. Or just point it out wonderingly: tell them that today's is the third bread reading they've heard in a row, with two more to come. Did the lectionary compilers reason that lots of people are away in August, so no one person in the pews will hear all five of them? Or was it because Mark, the shortest of the Gospels, needed a little padding, so they borrowed some from John and tucked it away here in August where no one will see?

It's not that there aren't lots of good and interesting things to say about bread. You can preach about the Eucharist, drawing from a writer in one of the first communities that celebrated it, one who seeks to communicate the transformative presence of Christ in the sacrament: the Christians who receive him in the bread have eternal life already, he says, not just an endless timeline of life after they die, but a way of living the timelessness of eternal life now.

Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, says Jesus, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. Death—Jesus' death, our death—is not the end of much, in this view; it is a moment in the midst of a much larger life. Eternal life consists of grasping this fact and living in it, living as if we were already there, in heaven itself at the moment we take the bread. No wonder the gnostics found John so appealing.

Yet the very bread-ness of bread, the simple physicality of eating it, prevents us from imagining ourselves out of this world altogether, as some early Christians longed to do. At my church we used to take turns buying pita bread for the Eucharist. One Sunday someone failed to look carefully at the package before buying it. As the plate made the rounds, person after person began to smile: it was garlic pita. That particular Eucharistic meal probably tasted more like the Last

Supper than most of our Eucharist meals.

Garlicky or otherwise, we eat bread every day. It's nothing remarkable. Like all food, it ties us firmly to life. Look at the people Jesus heals who immediately reconnect with food: [Peter's mother-in-law](#), [Jairus's daughter](#). Look at Jesus on the shore, [cooking a fish](#) for his friends' breakfast. Look at the two on the [Emmaus road](#), inviting their mysterious new friend to eat supper with them.

Take and eat, Jesus says, and let your simple bread become me. Don't let a single thing in your life, however ordinary a thing it may be, remain untouched by your new life in me. Don't think for a moment that it is an ordinary thing; there are no ordinary things. Allow your eternal life to transform *this* life, so that the two are one thing, a seamless garment.

Cinnamon-raisin loaves

Dissolve 1/2 cup sugar and 2 packages dry yeast in 3 1/2 cups warm water, 3 tbsp oil and 1 tsp salt in a large bowl. Stir to mix. Let stand 5 minutes. Add 8 cups flour; knead, adding flour as necessary to make soft dough. Place in large greased bowl and grease entire surface of dough. Cover with damp dish towel and let rise in warm place until double in size, about an hour.

Punch down; divide into 4 pieces. Flour surface, roll out each to about a 9"x 13" rectangle. Spray surface with water. Mix 1/2 cup sugar and 1 tbsp cinnamon in small bowl and sprinkle generously over dough, then sprinkle evenly with raisins, about 1/4 cup per loaf. Roll dough with short side to form loaf, and pinch ends together to seal in filling. Place seam down in greased 4"x 8" loaf pan. Brush top with butter. Let rise until double in size.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bake 25 minutes. Remove from oven and brush with butter again while hot. Let sit for 10-15 minutes and remove from pans. Cool loaves on rack.

Or make garlic bread instead:

Reduce the first 1/2 cup sugar to 1 tbsp and use olive oil instead of vegetable oil. After rolling rectangles, brush each with olive oil and 1 tbsp

finely minced fresh garlic instead of sugar/cinnamon mixture, leaving out the raisins. Brush with oil instead of butter. Bellissimo.