

# Bread

By Elizabeth Hunter

In pre-Christian times, bread was a staple believed to unite people when shared. Throughout Scripture, God provides bread that sustains life. During the first Passover meal, the Israelites ate unleavened bread (Exodus 12). During the Exodus, God rained down bread from heaven, "manna," to nourish the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16).

In the New Testament, Jesus calls himself the "bread of life" and "living bread" given for "the life of the world" (John 6:35, 51). Ironically, bread is also a temptation. Tempted by the devil in the desert, Jesus won't make bread from stones to quell his hunger, because "one does not live by bread alone" (Matthew 4:4). But Jesus uses his power to multiply a few loaves to feed thousands whose hunger is both physical and spiritual (Mark 6:30-44). During his last meal with the disciples, Jesus broke bread, calling it his body and telling them to share it in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19). When Jesus says that to eat of the living bread is to never die (John 6:51), we understand that eating also means receiving and believing all that he is for us.

For Christians, bread means life, forgiveness and salvation. In eucharistic bread, we receive the real presence of Christ and celebrate the gift of grace. Grace-full bread is also fed to us in the sharing of the word and in Christian community. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

Bread is also a sign of inclusion. Born in Bethlehem (meaning "house of bread"), Jesus is bread for the world, not just our church or our country (John 6:14). Many pious Jews only broke bread with those they considered pure, but Jesus broke it with questionable folk. As Christ gave himself as bread for the world, the body of Christ--the church--is called to do and be the same.

