

Over the past century, huge changes have been made to the way food is prepared and delivered to us. From drive-thru restaurants to driverless cars, our eating and drinking have been transformed by innovation. Consider the following examples...

Food delivery began in 1922. Telephone-based food ordering started at a Chinese restaurant in Los Angeles, and it spread rapidly. Now, delivery is roughly a \$44 billion dollar industry in the United States, involving apps such as Grubhub and Door Dash. That number might be even higher these days because of the pandemic.

Did you know that drive-thru restaurants first appeared in 1948, when In-N-Out Burger allowed people to order and pick up food without ever leaving their cars. These days, around 70 percent of fast-food sales are drive-thru, and even businesses such as Starbucks and Subway have gotten in on the act.

Then, *Instagram* appeared back in 2010, establishing a new relationship between food and photosharing. Now, not only do we eat food, we send and receive pictures of it! And finally, in 2017, *robots* became the latest innovation in eating. Chowbotics is a robot salad maker, Cafe X is a robot barista, and Domino's Pizza announced that it would be testing delivery via self-driving cars. "Customers can grab their order from the back," reports a magazine called *Fast Company*, "with no human interaction necessary." That's kind of creepy, isn't it? No human interaction necessary.

After reading our Gospel lesson this morning, one might say that Jesus was a true innovator in the world of eating, but thankfully he always had a human touch. In all four gospels, Jesus feeds 5,000 people by the Sea of Galilee. With just five barley loaves and two fish, he creates a meal in which everyone gets as much as they want, and all are satisfied.

In John's Gospel, Jesus warns the crowd not to focus too much on the bread that he has just given them. "Do not work for the food that perishes," he says, "but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." The people are curious about this "food that endures for eternal life," wondering what in the world Jesus is talking about. Is he speaking about easy-to-store, vacuum-sealed food, cooked in a water bath, or a steam environment through a cooking method called the *sous vide* process?

Not exactly! The people of Galilee have already experienced innovations in eating. Not drive-thru restaurants, or food prepared by Robots, but miraculous bread that came from heaven. "Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness," they say; "as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus, of course, knows all about this manna-style bread, but he wants to introduce the people to something new. "Very truly, I tell you," says Jesus, "it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven." It's almost as if he is saying, "Bread from heaven is great, but not as awesome as the 'true bread from heaven.'" In fact, you might even say that Jesus wants his followers to know that an even bigger innovation is coming.

"The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven," Jesus announces, "and gives life to the world." Of course, from what we know about the Lord, he is talking about heavenly bread that doesn't simply fill our stomachs, or satisfy our hunger, but it actually "gives life to the world." You won't find that one on the menu at Panera when your craving a sandwich with some soup! Not surprisingly, the people's response is similar to the Samaritan woman at the well who had learned about living water, they answer, "Sir, give us this bread always!"

More than likely we can understand their hunger, while wondering whether they really know what they are requesting. What exactly is this bread of God that

gives life to the world? It's not a frozen loaf that can be baked in an oven. It's not a type of bread kneaded by a robot or delivered by a driverless car. No, this bread of God is nothing less than Jesus himself. "I am the bread of life," says Jesus.

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

The greatest of all innovations when it comes to eating is the appearance of Jesus as the "bread of life." For the first time in history, we are able to receive "the true bread from heaven" which gives life to the world, while also satisfying our deepest hunger and thirst. Which begs the question, so what does it mean for Jesus to give life to the world?

The answer to this question is both universal and very personal, and both levels are equally important. After all, bread is a universal food, available almost everywhere around the world. It is also very personal, in the sense that it appears in many different forms, in a variety of cultures, from pitas to baguettes, from tortillas to Lefse.

On a universal level, Jesus is the Word of God in human form. As God's Word, he existed "in the beginning with God." John tells us that all things came into being through him, and "what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

Whether you are pondering the Big Bang, or the creation of life on Planet Earth, it is important to realize that Jesus was there. Everything has come into being through him, including life. In fact, the apostle Paul says something similar in his letter to the Colossians, when he describes Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. "All things have been created through him and for him," says Paul. "In him all things hold together."

Jesus was in the beginning with God. In him all things hold together. This is the universal Jesus, the eternal bread that gives life to the world. But maybe

consuming such a cosmic Christ is too big for us to swallow in one piece. Perhaps it is just too hard for us to take a bite out of such a large loaf. So it's better to drop to a much more personal level, focusing on Jesus as the bread of life for each of us. Perhaps that's why he was born in a little town called Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." As our personal bread, Jesus gives us strength to face the challenges of life, which include both small irritations and huge obstacles.

I'm fairly certain that most of us know what it feels like to be "hangry" -- that is, bad-tempered or irritable as a result of being hungry. A little snack can lift our spirits and give us the strength we need to move ahead. Long-distance runners know that they cannot complete an entire marathon with the fuel they have in their stomachs from breakfast. They have to eat along the way, fueling their muscles with gel-packs, and power bars, and other carbohydrates.

As the bread of life, Jesus gives us the help we need. He is the Word of God in human form, offering us correction and guidance and forgiveness. He is the bread of life in human form, giving us nourishment, and strength, and inspiration. Without this living bread, we would quickly wear out, and give up, in the face of the many challenges of life. Jesus is the One who is with us, and available to us, able to satisfy our hunger and our thirst.

The sacrament of the Lord's supper is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month in many churches, and more frequently in other congregations. Of course, here at First Lutheran, we celebrate communion every week. It's no surprise to us, that it is a meal that is offered regularly, because we all need the nourishment that comes from the bread and the cup we receive during communion. When Jesus broke bread at the Last Supper and said, "This is my body given for you," he fully expected that his followers would break bread regularly in remembrance of him. He knew that they we would need the bread of life not just once, but over, and over, and over again.

Of course, the way for us to get the bread that comes down from heaven -- namely Jesus himself is to continue coming to him, and to continue believing in him. Both our coming and our believing are not a group effort, but an individual response, as the result of God working in us. And it is important to note that there are two different ways of understanding the Greek word John uses for "coming" (*erchomai*). One way is to look at it, is as a human effort. The crowd comes to Jesus under their own power and volition -- but with improper motives (they want to make him their earthly King.” The other way is the result of a divine effort. Coming to Jesus happens only because God has drawn them, because they have heard and learned from God, and because God granted it.

Jesus is God's greatest innovation, the one sent into the world "so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." When we believe in him, and eat the bread of life Jesus offers us, we receive forgiveness, and inspiration that we need, to face the many challenges that we often encounter in this world. Nourished than by "the food that endures for eternal life," we are able to be Christ's people to our neighbors, our co-workers, our family members, our friends, our acquaintances, and we are able to point others toward the peace, justice, love, forgiveness, and salvation of the kingdom of heaven.

Over the centuries, there have been many innovations in eating, from takeout, to food delivery, to salad-making robots. But all of our earthly food, no matter how many different ways we try to preserve it, eventually spoils; it is after all "the food that perishes." None of it endures for eternal life. Only by believing in Jesus can we receive the bread of God, which gives life to the world, both universally and personally. Today, we join the crowd around Jesus in saying, "Sir, give us this bread always." And we don't even have to use a telephone, or an app, to make the request. And thanks be to God for that. Amen..