**Sermon:** *“One Table, Many Stories”*

**Shared Stories of Faith for Worldwide Communion**

**October 5, 2025**

**Squamish United Church**

Across the world’s faiths, bread is a sign of nourishment, community, and the sacred. I am deeply grateful to Arlene Robinson who is our representative on the Squamish Multi Faith Association who did all the research for this service today.. The **Squamish Multifaith Association** is a community organization dedicated to building bridges of understanding, respect, and cooperation among people of diverse faiths and beliefs in Squamish, BC. Formed in 2011, the group includes representatives from many traditions—including Christian, Bahá’í, Sikh, Indigenous, Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish communities—who work together through dialogue, education, and service. Guided by the principle of the Golden Rule, their mission is to foster harmony, goodwill, and peace through shared learning, interfaith gatherings, and collaborative action on social and environmental issues that support the common good.

Today, we are going to go on a journey…a bread journey. Telling stories of faith through bread. It is entitled One table, many stories. Thank you to the many people who donated bread for this service of Worldwide Communion.

We begin with the Anglican tradition, where bread is central to the Eucharist, a reminder of Christ’s body shared in love. (Hold up Sour Dough). Here is what Rev. Cameron had to say when asked what role bread plays in their tradition. “St. John the Divine shares in Holy Communion every week – it is central to our communal life and prayer. It is, in some ways, the climax of our service, where we gather to share in communion – community-with God, with each other, with the church around the world, with those who have gone before us, and with the whole of creation. We remember and root ourselves in the story of salvation, and feast on God’s very self, offered freely, in love for us and for the whole world. Through this sacrament and by all the ways we commune with God and with one another in our worship (prayers, music, reflection and fellowship), we are fed and strengthened to go out into the world, into our lives, to love and serve the Lord.

The **United Church of Canada** and the **Anglican Church of Canada** are closely linked in our **theology and practice of the sacrament of communion** through their shared **Protestant and ecumenical heritage**, and especially through their participation in the **World Council of Churches** and the **Canadian Council of Churches**.

Both churches view communion (the Eucharist) as a **sacrament of grace, thanksgiving, and unity in Christ**, open to all who seek to follow Jesus. We share similar liturgical patterns—prayers of thanksgiving, the words of institution, breaking of bread, and sharing of cup—and both see the table as **inclusive**, welcoming all people at the United Church table and all baptized Christians at the Anglican table.

Theologically, both traditions affirm what’s often called the **“real spiritual presence”** of Christ in the bread and wine—not a literal transformation (as in Catholic transubstantiation), but a deep sacramental encounter with the living Christ. This is the (hold up) **amazing gluten-free bread** that Mary Larcombe makes for us each month.

In the **Catholic tradition**, the sacrament of Communion—also called the **Eucharist**—is the central act of worship and a profound mystery of faith. Catholics believe in the **Real Presence of Christ** in the bread and wine, which are consecrated to become the Body and Blood of Christ through the act of transubstantiation. The Eucharist is both a remembrance of Jesus’ Last Supper and a living participation in His sacrifice, drawing believers into unity with God and with one another. It is celebrated as an act of thanksgiving (“Eucharist” means thanksgiving in Greek) and renewal, nourishing the faithful for lives of love, service, and reconciliation in the world. Within Catholicism, thin wafers or the host is consecrated at Mass, becoming the heart of worship and a visible sign of God’s presence. Here is what Rev. Ann Gawley said: “At St Joseph’s Catholic Church, we commune with God through daily personal prayer, weekly or daily Mass offered by our priest and special devotions and Mass at Christmas and Easter to mark the birth and crucifixion of Jesus. Above all through works of mercy and compassion towards others in our daily lives, we commune with God.

Next is the **Bahá’í Faith**. There is no formal sacrament of communion or ritual use of bread in worship, as Bahá’ís focus on a more **spiritual and symbolic relationship with God** rather than physical rites. However, the meaning often associated with bread—**nourishment, unity, and sustenance**—is deeply reflected in Bahá’í teachings. Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of the Bahá’í Faith, often used bread as a **metaphor for divine wisdom and the spiritual food** that sustains the soul. During Bahá’í gatherings, such as devotional meetings or community feasts held every nineteen days, believers share prayers, readings, and fellowship, sometimes accompanied by the sharing of simple food. In this way, while bread is not a ritual element, the Bahá’í community embraces its **symbolic meaning of spiritual nourishment and unity among all people**.

In Hindu practice, bread takes many forms—roti, **(hold up)** **naan,** puri—offered to the deities as prasad, then shared among devotees as a blessing. Bread holds both **practical and spiritual significance**, often symbolizing the nourishment that sustains all life. The most common form of bread is **roti or chapati**, an unleavened flatbread made daily in many Indian homes. During worship and festivals, bread and other foods are offered to deities as **prasad**—sacred food that, after being blessed, is shared among devotees. This act represents the belief that all sustenance ultimately comes from the Divine and that sharing food fosters community and humility. In temples and homes alike, offering bread and receiving it as prasad is a **gesture of gratitude, devotion, and interconnectedness**, reminding Hindus that both giver and receiver are united in the sacred cycle of nourishment.

Among Indigenous peoples, bannock and other traditional breads are shared in circles of hospitality, symbolizing kinship with one another and with the Creator. **Bannock** is a simple bread with a complex and layered history among Indigenous peoples across Canada. Originally introduced by Scottish and European fur traders, bannock was adapted by Indigenous communities who made it their own using available ingredients such as flour, lard, baking powder, and water. Before European contact, Indigenous peoples made similar forms of bread from local plants, roots, or ground grains such as corn, cattail, or wild rice. When traditional food systems were disrupted by colonization and forced relocation, bannock became an essential staple—a symbol of adaptability and survival during a time of great hardship. It could be cooked over an open fire, baked, or fried, making it a versatile food that sustained families even in the most difficult circumstances.

Over time, bannock has come to represent **resilience, community, and cultural continuity**. It is shared at gatherings, ceremonies, and feasts, connecting generations and reminding people of their shared history and endurance. Though its origins are tied to colonial trade and imposed food systems, Indigenous peoples have transformed bannock into something uniquely their own—a food that nourishes body and spirit, celebrates ingenuity, and honours the strength of ancestors who found ways to thrive in the face of adversity. Today, we will be serving (hold up) bannock bites and as you taste it, consider that eating it is an act of remembrance and pride, a reclaiming of culture that turns a symbol of survival into one of **identity and belonging**.

In the **Sikh tradition**, bread holds deep spiritual and communal meaning, most visibly expressed through the **langar**, the free community meal served in every gurdwara. The bread, usually **roti**, is a simple, unleavened flatbread made from whole wheat flour and water, sometimes with a touch of oil or ghee. Volunteers prepare the roti as part of **seva**, or selfless service, and everyone—regardless of background, status, or faith—sits together to share the meal. This practice embodies Sikh principles of **equality, humility, and unity**, showing that bread is not just nourishment for the body but also a **spiritual practice** that feeds the soul and strengthens community bonds.

In **Jewish tradition**, bread holds profound spiritual and cultural significance, serving as both sustenance and a symbol of God’s provision. The most common types of ritual bread are **challah**, a braided egg bread that graces the Sabbath table as a reminder of God’s provision and of manna in the wilderness—an image that now draws us toward the table of Christ, where bread is once again shared as a gift of God’s abundance. **Matzah**, is the unleavened bread eaten during **Passover** to commemorate the Israelites’ hasty departure from Egypt. Bread is often blessed before meals with the **Hamotzi** prayer, expressing gratitude for God’s daily gifts. Beyond its practical role as food, bread in Judaism represents **community, continuity, and divine blessing**, and it is central to many sacred occasions, connecting families and congregations through shared meals and centuries of tradition.

Yesterday, I set out to buy **challah bread** to share with you today. I walked into the local bakery full of anticipation, only to discover that all the loaves were gone. Confused, I asked the baker, and she laughed kindly and explained that challah is **only baked on Fridays**, in preparation for **Shabbat**. The loaves are meant to grace the Friday night table, a symbol of rest, blessing, and community. I realized in that moment that the timing wasn’t just practical—it was deeply tied to tradition. The bread carries meaning not just in its flavor or texture, but in the rhythm of the week, the anticipation of gathering, and the sacredness of preparing for Shabbat. It was a simple lesson in patience, respect, and the profound connection between food, faith, and time. So today, I ask you to imagine a beautiful loaf of **(hold up) egg bread.**

Across the world, in every tradition we have explored, bread is much more than food—it is a symbol of **nourishment, community, faith, and the sacred connections that bind us together**. Whether it is challah on Shabbat, roti in a langar, bannock shared among Indigenous communities, or the bread of Hindu and Bahá’í offerings, each tradition reminds us that breaking bread is an act of **love, gratitude, and unity**. As we now gather around the table in our own United Church tradition, we bring these stories with us, recognizing that the bread we share in communion is part of a **larger, worldwide table of God’s people**, connecting us in Christ to a rich tapestry of faith, hope, and shared humanity.