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Theme: Bread of Life

Text: Acts 2

Place: Christ Episcopal Church Pittsburgh

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Event:

Appeal for:

p.1 Appreciation for prayer

p1 Uganda liberation

p2 Rehabilitation
Bread of Life

p4 Breaking Bread together

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It's a great pleasure and a privilege for me to come and be with you this evening to bring you greetings from your Christian brothers and sisters in Uganda and in Africa in general and to also praise God for all your prayers as you have been with us particularly during the time when we were under pressure, in persecutions under Amin. We know that many of you did pray and many of you did participate spiritually with us although you are not there physically. So we praise God for that and I tell you that there are many many thousands and thousands of Christians who love the Lord Jesus Christ and who have found in Him that help during the times when pressures are too high, the burdens are too heavy and the dangers are imminent. The presence of the Lord Jesus becomes not only a sweet but it becomes that power which uplifts the weak and ushers you into the arena of freedom. Since Amin left Uganda during the war 1979/80 some of us in exile have come back with a tremendous excitement. We found that the church had grown and doubled during this time of pressure and danger. And therefore it was very exciting that in spite of many people who carried wounds deep in their human persons, for indeed there were deep wounds. Many people lost their beloved ones. There are many widows and orphans. There was a whole trail of suffering and pain and so on and yet in the midst of all this, there was a praising community who really acted like an antidote. God's people were people who brought hope to the hopeless who actually brought joy where everything, where everything was dark and foreboding and dangerous. We praise God for that. And so we took over, started again with Jesus Christ with a tremendous ministry in our country. Because we found that the church had the tremendous responsibility of sharing the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, His forgiving love, His reconciling grace, all these which seemed words they were now practical realities in many

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hearts which had suffered wounds and pains in that was primary, primary in our ministry. It was, really, the priority was what that. But you can't restore a community with such deep suffering and misery physically unless you first of all restore their spiritual relationship with God and then with one another. And so this is the stupendous ministry which we find ourselves. We are reminded repeatedly even by those who are not wholly committed to Jesus that we, the Christians, the ministers of the Gospel, believe in Jesus Christ, hold the key for rehabilitating many shattered lives. We praise God. We accept that responsibility with trembling and fear, realizing that the harvest is so ready for harvesting and yet always the laborers to harvest it and bringing it in are always very few. But I want to tell you it is exciting to be in Uganda today and to share with God's people in that wonderful good news. Not only have we found a community which passed through suffering but since we went back, God has used His wonderful Word to bring many many thousands of people to Himself. I could give you incident after incident when we have seen packed out congregations, singing crowds of people, listening with a tremendous seriousness to the Gospel and in the good news receiving healing for their own souls. And then you find them liberated to praise. So we thank God for that.

I am just going to share with you a few words, because you see we are talking about "Bread of Life". Jesus said, I am the bread of life. In other words I am the only one who can satisfy the deep seated needs of mankind. He was not talking about a loaf of bread although that is a picture language. But he was speaking about some deeper hunger, the kind of hunger which bread doesn't touch, which drinks don't satisfy. And yet of course as we talk about that satisfaction which Jesus alone can give, welcoming Him into my person means that that person with its

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many needs, with his areas which are like a desert, can be satisfied. He alone as a person, as a God of human flesh, with his love and grace can really really satisfy humanity. And where humanity when men and women experience that, that, what happens then? They share their bread. Then they share their clothes. They share because then in Him they discover their brothers and sisters here and there who are in need. Before that, we can't share. We may even share what we don't need which is not true. Christian sharing, Christian sharing means that we share what we need with others. Now let me just read to you this passage in Acts of the Apostles and you see what happens when Jesus Christ, his the risen Lord, takes his place on the throne of his people's hearts. Ordinary people, in Acts Chapter two. We will read these words at the end of the chapter. A lot of things happened to the community in Jerusalem and they were very ordinary people. They were ordinary men and women. They were not rich in material things. They were not highly educated either. They didn't have high status in society. They were very common. Very ordinary. The disciples of Jesus Christ, men and women. And then something happened, which you know very well. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, the power of God, the helper, He came from above because Jesus had died and rose again. So the gates of heaven were absolutely wide open and the blessings of the Father were now ready to come pouring down because Jesus had died. Because Jesus had risen from the dead. That is how the power from above, what power - the power to make the weak a strong. The power to make the blind see. What is this power? May I just repeat gently, the power was the risen Christ enthroned upon the hearts of his ordinary people. And listen what happened. It was beautiful. They, the disciples of Jesus Christ, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship. It is really at this time that you hear that word, Fellowship, in a togetherness, a sharing.

experience so that instead of men and women living in isolation and loneliness, there was a fellowship. People together. . . . they continued they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship. And the breaking of bread and to prayer. Breaking of bread. Not only Holy Communion as we use it in our church. This was a breaking of bread in their homes together. And to prayer. Everyone of them was filled with awe. There was a kind of, a kind of feeling of the presence of God - the presence of the risen Lord upon them. So that what they did, there was a kind of awe, an awful feeling, not a slavish fear but a presence which made you walk on tiptoes as it were. This was a liberating presence and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Sharing their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. What a community. What a liberated group of human beings. This was not structure. No, structure kills things. This was unstructured fellowship. Here was a spontaneous overflow of life from the King of Kings on the hearts of this people and when He sat on their hearts in power, what, what happened? Needs were shared and those who had did not look at what they had as the source of joy. The only joy they had was to share it. They looked at whatever they possessed as possessed in order to be shared. Not possessed in order to make me secure. In other words the Spirit of God gave this group of people ability to possess their possessions. You see me, in most cases we never possess. We are possessed. We worship things we have. The homes we built, the material things God has given to us. Instead of being things to be shared, they become things to be hoarded. And we have them

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and we empty them and in the end they possess us. The bank accounts we have and the life we have. You see, these dear people, when Jesus came and sat and dwelled in their hearts, they experienced a strange liberation. They began to feel free to move. They began to look at their lives as my life is very important if I can share it with another person. My experience is wonderful if I share it with another person. They became a sharing community. And because they became a liberated community to share what they possessed became wonderful for service. If they had possessions or land or houses or clothes, whatever they had, had become an instrument to heal community. No wonder you read at the end they lay together with glad hearts. You see, that was the key. You can't share unless your hearts have been brought into harmony. The Spirit of God turned them up. He filled them with the love of Christ and therefore they began to get in act in harmony. It was very strange. Well, like Peter. He was just like you and like me. Remember one day he asked Jesus and he said, Lord Jesus, I gave up my fishing business. What am I going to get? He was not yet free. He was still thinking in the terms of what, what he was going to get back. There are many Christians who have never discovered the liberty of Jesus in their hearts. They think that to be a Christian is to serve my own soul, is to, so that in the end when they die, they won't go to hell. You know, this sort of mentality Christians are not like that. Christians are made children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit in order that they may live for Jesus. And to live for Jesus means to share yourself, to share what you have and that is sweet. I have seen it in Africa. When Jesus began to come into the hearts of his people in the church, and the Holy Spirit made their hearts his throne. It was beautiful.

I began to see, I was only a young fellow in those days when God's renewing grace started to penetrate the congregation. And I saw some very wonderful things taking place among the common people. I remember... in our culture in Africa we pay bride price for getting married. And usually there are young people who can't do it because they are not rich enough. They have no cows to pay the bride price. And usually of course relatives help their relatives. But when Jesus began to liberate his people in the church, I saw people who were not relatives at all using their own cows to pay the bride price for another Christian brother. And everybody was shocked and surprised. I saw people going to help an elderly person whose little house was falling to pieces and they went and they built him a little house or her a small house singing about Jesus. This person was not a Christian and so he said, How come? Why are they doing that? Is this a hidden agenda, do they have a hidden agenda? I don't have money to pay them. Why are they coming to build for me? And they said, we don't need any money. We are enjoying sharing building you a little house. And they built this house singing for Jesus and many times by the time they finished, the person said, I also would be glad to find him who makes you so happy who makes you want to build a house for me without getting anything back. And yet you see, they realized these Christians were actually getting something back which was greater than money. Look by the time they finished the little house, they would go into the house, put their arms around the person they built the house for, prayed and sang and rejoiced and they went home. Now no money can really make people sing. Even if they had received, had received the money, they would never have received that. So you see, they were learning the liberty of the Holy Spirit in the love of Jesus Christ. They became instruments for liberating other people.

And you know this was the experience of the church this is how the church began. It began beautifully, didn't it? It began, in fact when you read, you feel they were becoming human beings. You see, they are eating together. They were singing as they ate. They were rejoicing. I know meetings in my own community when people sat together in homes and they ate together and sang and sang together through the night. and many times you find that by the time they are through, others come to find out, they sit there, they watch these Christians, as they eat together, as they share and praise, and many times, many more are added to the kingdom of God, many more were saved. Not because of the preacher but because of the infectious love of the Christians. And I think that that is the beauty of the Christian church, particularly today, if it was very important at the beginning just when the church began, in those first thirty or forty years of the Christian faith. I want to tell you that it much more now. Take a country like Uganda.

What do you put in those wounds so that people who have experienced pain can laugh, what do you put in there? And yes indeed, you can give them some bread and they need it, some water to drink they need it because we have bottles, but that does not get to the roots, it is the love of Christ ministered through liberated hearts, hearts which know, what it means to be forgiven and to forgive one another. Hearts which have experienced reconciliation, Peter, who knew, I denied my Lord, and I suffered for it, but he forgave me. When He rose from the dead, he accepted me, what a wonderful Savior. Such a liberated heart, Mary of Magdala who wept and wept and wept, because her greatest friend had died like a criminal on the cross, and she was lingering by the grave, the Risen Lord came and called her by name, "Mary" and Mary turned and grabbed his feet, and she was set free, and she ran to tell the story.

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One after another, Thomas who was skeptical, you know there are many Thomases in the church, they go on skeptically, you know they can't believe it. ~~SSpeak to them about how exciting it is to find Jesus, they say no~~ he is not realistic. ~~I was preaching in England last month, and I had~~ been preaching in Germany in June and as I looked at some of the congregations in West Germany, in some of their old beautiful Gothic Cathedrals, very cold, and I was speaking to them, I said to these dear Christians friends, I said, do you know what is happening here, as I look at you, you have actually been penetrated by the spirit of despair. ~~Y~~ You now can no longer believe, that there is hope, about which Christians should be excited. ~~I~~ In fact the philosophy in Western countries says if you get excited you are not realistic. In order to be realistic you have to be miserable. ~~I~~ In other words if you look really heavy and utterly dejected then you are serious about life, because life is miserable. ~~S~~ So the more miserable you are the more realistic you are about life. ~~Y~~ You know what sort of life is that. ~~T~~ To die while you are still living? Can this be the kind of Christianity Jesus came to give us? ~~I~~ Is this the kind of faith Jesus died and rose again to give his people? ~~A~~ A kind of faith which can never help you to go through your burden? ~~N~~ No it wasn't like that. If you read this one it was exciting. ~~D~~ Does that mean that there was no danger? ~~t~~ there were no dangers? ~~J~~ Jerusalem was full of danger at that time. ~~T~~ The Roman Soldiers, the pharisees, scribes, the enemies of Jesus. ~~T~~ They were all there, and yet here is a group of men and women absolutely undefeated. Full of joy, sharing what they had, selling their properties, you know, they were very secure, weren't they? Jesus makes those who find Him really secure. ~~O~~ One day we were talking back in my diocese and we were talking about starting a little mission by Lake Edward

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among the fishermen, there was church so we started there a little mission we called it the Galileian experience, that is, we were going to put a little boat on the water, which we appointed a priest to go there who was going to start from nothing. And we said, the boat is going to be used for fishing purposes, he is going to get some fish and then you sell the fish then you get your stipend, that is how we do things you know, in Africa.

I don't know how many priests would like to do that sort of thing, but that is what we did, that's why we called it the Galileian experience on Lake Edward, you know in the name of Lake Galilee although it is much bigger than lake Galilee. So we were going to do that, and we were discussing it in a diocesan council, and as we were discussing it an elderly lady about 70 years old got up, and she came to the table, where the chairman, being the bishop was sitting and

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And she said, "You've been discussing that mission by Lake Edward where you want to take priests so that they may hear of the good news. I felt touched," she said, "And here is my first contribution." And she put, on the table, all the money she had. It wasn't much, but it was all she had. She left nothing behind. And we looked at her, taken aback, most of us had more money, most of us had bank accounts, most of the members had, had, their cattle and their goats and their sheep, the kind of things they call riches in Africa, this lady had only ten shillings, Ugandan shillings, that's about a dollar and a half, and she put the whole things on the table. For the Lord Jesus. Absolutely liberated! She went back with her arms up in the air, praising Jesus, and we looked like fools. Not only fools, but we looked rather cold. Lovely resolutions... the lady had no resolutions to make, she didn't even understand our resolutions. But she was practical. She was a practical Christian. The love of Christ liberated her so that the little money she had she put on the table, and she went back absolutely free in Christ, having shared what she had. There is now a mission, there is another priest, there is now a church by the lake, and many people have heard about Jesus, have been there confirming people and we have got a young, upcoming, new church by the Lake Edward. But it all began when that lady used her life. For her it wasn't money, for her it was a heart in tune with the heart of Jesus. Her eyes were opened, and love made her see, a passion for those fishermen who had not yet heard about Jesus. She couldn't go, she was only seventy, but she wanted to make others go. So as I conclude, when we talk about hunger, when we talk about people starving, when we talk about people sharing the bread, and we say, Jesus said, "I am the bread which came from heaven, to give men and women the life they need." In other words, he came to be shared. He didn't come to guard against his security, ^{if} there

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was anything Jesus never thought about, it was his security. He lived very secure, but completely outside in the exposure, and very vulnerable indeed. Open to danger, open to need, open to men and women, he never spared himself. That's why Christianity is a wonderful faith. It is producing men and women, young people who say, "My possessions are of no importance to me, except as I share them with those for whom Christ died." We have wonderful exciting things which are challenging us in Uganda, the church who has called in relief, and rehabilitation, preaching, teaching, seminars, and then feeding the hungry. And then you find our priests, you know, going out as agents for distributing food, blankets, medicines, where medicine was no longer to be found. Our team of African evangelists of African Enterprise which works with our church of Uganda, Anglican, run around preaching the gospel, helping priests at the same time, feeding, in the Karamoja area, more than 30,000 school children. And then there were other Christian organizations, also engaged in that wonderful program, feeding camps who were established, and then thousands of those people gathered, men and children and women, to receive a little something provided by love, to save them from dying of starvation. I went to one of the camps, one day, with a team, after we had been at one school where we were giving these children, last year we were only giving them three meals a week. Three meals a week, small children, between seven, eight, nine, and fourteen. And schools had closed because of famine, but because of this program, they opened again, and worked with the government, education officers, parents and teachers, and I wish you could have seen the joy of those people as the children began to recover. And the terrible feeling of starvation left their eyes, and you saw the beginning sparkle, I went to see, and we stopped at one of the schools, there were 600 children. First we went to the kitchen, to see what they were preparing, oatmeal and beans and peas,

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preparing this simple food for them. And the little bowls in which to use by those children, and then when we had been in the kitchen and seen what was going on, and the children begin to play, after four months of this wonderful provision, we sat under a big tree. And we had a man with a guitar, a young men, and began to play some songs, and the children began to clap and sing, and we told them about Jesus Christ. It was a wonderful scene. To see what is happening the Lord Jesus Christ, making sense, practical sense, to those children. When you talk about the love of God, there was no problem in explaining it, it was there. And then we went on from that school, another 160 miles, to the Karamoja area, and we landed in a feeding camp, and people came, and they were making their little food and getting their rations, and really just recovering from starvation. Many of them hardly with any flesh on their bones. And as I stood there with a number of other christian brothers, I came with in a van, two children came among the people who were greeting me, two lovely little boys, one this side, the other this side, the other this side, they took my hand, and you know as I looked at their hands, their hands had hardly any flesh on them, they were just little bones really, just coming back to life. And yet they put their little hands in mine an expression of loving me. And you know they made me become aware I was at the receiving end, they were not at the receiving end. Indeed I might have been instrumental in helping other christians to bring aid to them, but what they gave when they held my hand, was not food, was not a blanket, was no.... it was a kind of love you/put into words, and I was in tears. It broke through me. That this little human beings, little children having gone through the misery of starvation, there they were, expressing love. That is what we mean when we say the in PBF for world relief, don't just give to oblivion, you see there are many agents who just give, that is not christian giving.

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Christian giving means that your heart is penetrated, that your feelings are disturbed, that your security is shared, that your comfort is no longer your comfort, that is how you become a humanized christian, a christian whose humanity has been restored by the Holy Spirit. And that is the Good News, And you can participate in those projects by giving through the PBF for World Relief, does money get there? We have been given grant last year which enabled us to bring together the clergy of our church, 1,300 of them. For three days conference, renewal and catch the vision of Jesus so that they may go back and share Jesus Christ with their people, and heal wounds, and bring about forgiveness among the people who are alienated, this to be, was made possible through the grant which was given by the PBF for world relief. We thank God for that, and we praise the Lord for the work and the ministry of our team of African Evangelistic Enterprise working together to bring the Good News, as well as Relief and rehabilitation to our people. So Pray for Uganda because the situation is still very difficult, the economy is completely down below. Money doesn't buy anything in Uganda now, and our money has sunk so low and yet we see there is a real hope if we can share as these christian brothers did if we can open our hearts to one another, as Christ opened his heart for us, then God will be glorified. Let us pray.

At this moment, as we hear those words ringing in our hearts and those who believed had their meals together, in harmony of heart in oneness and fellowship, and they shared their lives, their possessions and their homes, there were many more who were being saved and added to the community day by day. Is this our christianity? Do we share? Are we excited about it? Do we see humanity and its wounds? Then let us stretch our hands by faith, and put them in the wounded hands of our Lord who was wounded for our wounded

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human race, who knows refugees, wanderers of this earth
the poor, the embittered ones, and because he knows them
by name, let us put our hands, our hands in his, and then
go out with him as instruments for healing.

"Dear Lord we thank you for this evening, we thank you
that you did come, in the power of your blessed Holy Holy
Spirit, and you made your throne upon the hearts of
believers, thus setting them free, thus sending them
out, to share, to encourage, to heal, and to liberate.
We are members of this community Lord, we thank you
by faith, bless this congregation, oh bless your people
here that they may become indeed, instruments for
healing, the deep wounded communities in which we
live. In Uganda, in Ethiopia, in Zimbabwe, where in
the States, in Northern Ireland, areas of pain and
suffering. Bless us that we may bless in Jesus Name.
AMEN.

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Transcribed by

Irene

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