

PRAIRIE UNITARIAN-UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY

Easter Service March 29, 1970

THE BREAD OF LIFE

What is bread? To the man of today it is the smell of a bakery, or what mother used to make -- or the outside of a sandwich...a tasteless envelope crammed with preservatives..

But 5000 years ago, which is only yesterday in the evolution of our species, wafers of unleavened bread made from barley, millet, and oats, hard, unsweetened, but filling and nourishing, were made to last, over winter and spring, when meat and vegetables were gone or scarce.

Little wonder that our ancestors kept the unleavened wafer as holy bread -- symbol of God's bounty -- long after yeast bread, raised by fermentation of tastier wheat and rye had displaced the flat, unleavened bread of pastoral and transhuman tribal man.

The Egyptian prayed at his table and at the time of his death: "My bread is in Heaven with the sun god, my bread is on earth as well, the sun brings me my bread from God's house".

The Hebrew Borucha or blessing of bread says: "Praised be the Lord who brought this bread out of the ground..."

The Greeks at Eleusis every September ate a flour-and-water paste and shouted "She has risen" as a young girl, dressed as Persephone dramatized the rebirth of the grain before the altar of Demeter.

Jesus prayed -- "Give us this day our daily bread" -- the daily bread ration of every Roman subject, panem quotidianem, and he asked the Pharisees: "If thy son ask for bread -- will you give him a stone?" Yet the Devil tempted Jesus asking: "If thou be the son of God -- Command that these stones become bread" -- and Jesus answered -- "Man shall not live by bread alone but by the words of the Spirit also".

And so bread became a symbol of eternal life, of resurrection, the humble unleavened wafer became the bearer of the Godhead, the sacrifice, the mystical union...May this ordinary table which we ourselves have laid remind us of the eternal fact of human sharing, and the good bread and rich butter symbolize our striving and our thankfulness for all the joys of living.