

Jam

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
November 13, 2022
by Debby Laporte

What does the word jam mean to you?

A traffic jam i.e., the line up through construction? A sticky situation – mom I am in a bit of a jam – can you please help? A work jamming session? A printer jam? Jamming with fellow musicians – I am sure a lot of our wonderful musicians know about this. Or a wonderful concoction of cooked fruit that one can “spread” on toast, Pulla bread or scones? The sermon topic for today refers to the latter – but with a focus on “spreading” the good news and practicing good Stewardship.

But let's go back in history as we learn about where jam came from.¹ Jam has been made and eaten by societies throughout the centuries, from Ancient Greece to soldiers in the Napoleonic war. The history of this sweet stuff is far more interesting than you might think! Jar-making methods are linked to some of the earliest ways of preserving food, which date all the way back to the Stone Age – 2.6 million years ago! During the Stone Age people discovered ways to preserve food for storage, to make survival easier when food was scarce. Preservation using honey or sugar was one common method and the Ancient Greeks also used to use honey to preserve quince (a hard, aromatic bright golden-yellow pome fruit, very tart and astringent). Syrups made from honey and sugar were also used to preserve food; honey has no moisture, so it preserves any food encased within it.

The first written recipe for jam is recorded in the first known cookbook; *De Re Coquinaria* – the Art of Cooking. It is attributed to Marcus Gavius Apicius (believed to be a pseudonym) and dates from the fourth century AD. It contains over 500 recipes, many using Indian spices, as well as a recipe for soft fruit heated with honey. The mixture was cooled and stored, to create one of the earliest recorded forms of jam. This early jam was often served as a delicacy at the end of a meal.

During the Crusades (from 1095 to 1492), soldiers brought back sugar from the Middle East to Western Europe, significantly boosting jam's popularity. It also made the process of making jam much easier and production began to take off. Joan of Arc was said to have eaten quince jam for courage before battle and sailors began to stockpile jam aboard ships for long voyages. People had begun to make the link between vitamin c and scurvy, and fruit preserved in sugar was better than no fruit at all. The French astrologer and physician Nostradamus was another famous lover of jam, so much that he wrote a treatise on it called 'Treatise on Makeup and Jam'. This medical cookbook contains recipes for cherry jam, quince jelly and pear preserve as well as recipes to cure the plague! The first marmalade is believed to have been invented in 1561 by the physician to Mary, Queen of Scots. He used crushed oranges and sugar as a remedy for her seasickness.

While jam remained popular amongst the upper classes, large scale production of jam and preserves wasn't possible until the discovery of pasteurization. We can

¹ “The History of Jam” found on www.freshways.co.uk/a-history-of-jam-and-preserves/

thank the French military leader Napoleon Bonaparte for the widespread production of jam to be safely preserved in containers. John Chapman (nicknamed Johnny Appleseed) was one pioneer who helped to bring jam to the USA. He planted apple trees throughout large parts of the Midwest US during the 1800s, with the hope that people would make their own cider and preserves. In 1918, the American company Welch's began producing its first jam product, Grapelade. The entire inventory was bought by the US army and shipped to troops during the First World War and soldiers demanded more the product upon returning. In 1923 Welch's launched its Concord Grape Jelly, which is still available today.

Rationing and the general impact of WWI led to great anxiety about food shortages, but it was the members of the Women's Institute in the UK who came to the rescue. In 1940 they were given a government grant of 1,400 pounds to buy sugar for jam. This meant that a vast amount of fruit could be preserved over a longer period of time, to ensure that nothing went to waste. Preservation centers were set up in farm kitchens, village halls and even sheds, largely run by volunteers from the community. Between 1940 and 1945, over 5,300 tons of fruit were preserved and turned into over 1,600 tons of jam!

The most popular of jams that most people have in their cupboard or fridge is strawberry – the # 1 jam. Followed closely by grape jelly. I would have thought it would have been cherry or peach. Both my daughter and daughter-in-law have said that the best peach jam they have ever had is the one that one of my friends on Manitoulin makes and I must agree. My friend is quite famous for her jams. And then there is blueberry jam made out of the wild blueberries that grow in Northern Ontario in my backyard in New Sudbury and Hawberry Jam – a staple of our beautiful Manitoulin Island!

There are some very unusual types of jams, jellies and marmalade: Corn Cob, Lilac, Judzu Flower, Bacon, F.R.O.G. – Figs, Raspberry, Orange peel and Ginger, T.O.E. Jam – Tangerine, Orange and Elderberry, Cucumber, Salted Vanilla, Violet and Garlic! As varied as the many wonderful people we have in our congregation. What is your favourite?

And how many church events often include muffins or scones with a pot of jam or jelly! Mmmm – delicious. And no matter how time marches on, jam is always in style. Preferably for breakfast – slathered on toast or an English Muffin or a topping for yogurt-but really enjoyed at any meal. It can be considered a comfort food and in these times of uncertainty our need for comfort food is perfectly understandable.

When there is a prolific amount of fruit that would go to waste you can freeze it for later use or bring out the canning pot and utensils to make jam. It is a satisfying venture to use fruit that is not palatable and produce something that not only looks good but tastes amazing! And this fits into our Stewardship program. The wise use of resources. A teaspoon of jam makes the medicine go down! (actually, Julie Andrews said it was sugar – but I use jam!)

There are some raspberry bushes between my and Graham's home and our neighbour's. Many are now growing on our property. They produce an abundance of the tasty fruit. Graham has made raspberry jam for a few years now and when our

new neighbours moved in, we presented them with a jar of delicious jam made from these raspberries. All of the neighbours that have lived there over the past 25 years or so never picked the raspberries so you often find me or Graham out picking fresh berries for our morning breakfast. Fresh raspberries last only for a few days unless they are frozen and jam made from fresh berries does taste better. Graham picks the berries, makes the jam, and then shares the jars of fresh jam with a few of our neighbours and our family. A way of reaching out! I am so proud of you for doing this – Graham!

Jam is for sale in many stores, not just grocery stores – although our local Metro does have a wonderful selection. I am always on the lookout for jam – for Graham who would not be a happy camper if the larder was not filled with the usual dozen jam jars waiting to be opened and spread on toast or maybe an English muffin or my personal favourite – Pulla bread! Jam is a staple for sales at markets, at specialty shops and local bake sales. And there are jams for people who are diabetic or who just do not want as much sugar. I remember the Christmas cookies called Thumbprints that my mother used to make. Shortbread rolled in crushed nuts and baked with a dab of raspberry or apricot jam – they disappeared as fast as my mother could make them! Jam is a staple in many gift baskets. It is part of a charcuterie board spread – something I love to make for guests. It is in most cases comfort food. And in times of uncertainty our need for comfort food is needed.

So, Jam is a staple in most homes. But what about spiritual staples? We all have bibles in our homes, and a lot of us have hymn books. Prayer is a staple, reading the good book, studying and being grateful each day for the many blessings bestowed on us – and how do we spread the good news? Especially in these stressful times when we don't know if COVID is coming or going, inflation is not settling down, interest rates are going up and the economy is sliding into a recession. We worry about what is happening in Ukraine, Iran and other countries including our own.

Jesus' followers spread the good news via word of mouth – people wanted to know who this preacher was – he did preach in the synagogue, but he also chose hillsides, small and large outside gatherings and was very comfortable with his style of parables. A story painted a picture and was easier to convey his message of love and praise for God. He spoke about justice and helping the poor – he focused on purity of one's heart. He focused on teaching and taught his followers how to spread the Good News. His followers grew, often numbering in the thousands! Especially the Sermon on the Mount. People wanted to know more about this man who professed to be the Son of God – he referred to God as his father. He was the ultimate spreader of the Good News – especially in times of Roman Occupation. Hope was something people needed to hear – hope from God who looked after and cared for his people and who needed comfort back then as in present times.

So again – how can we spread the Good News? We can invite a person to church and maybe for lunch. We can send emails, cards, hold Zoom meetings – actually, I like Zooming – and we can call people like the wonderful people do from our Connex team. We can hold Bible Studies and get together to celebrate the life of someone who has passed. Sending cards or emails, reaching out to people in times of need.

And prayer – our church can be a beacon for those searching for solace and the word of God or who simply want to come and sing and listen. “Wherever two or more are gathered – I will be there!” Famous words that speak volumes.

We are so blessed with the wonderful technology that we have and the amazing talented and gifted people we have running the computers, sound and lighting systems and camera and bringing services into the comfort of our homes via Live Streaming and that we are able to watch at any time on U-Tube. A beautiful example of sharing our gifts and talents. Thank you!

And we can join one of the wonderful teams we have – read all about them in our brochure. Any of the chairs of the teams would love to hear from you. We need your support whether it be volunteering of time and talent or financial offerings. You can join the choir and I would be remiss if I did not thank the wonderful team of talented musicians that bring us beautiful music that enhances our services. All of our teams are what make this church hum and fulfil our mission. Without the countless volunteer hours we would not be the church that we are. They are spreading the Good News by everything they do for our church.

We now offer fellowship after church in the newly renovated Club 111 Lounge. We have refreshments and goodies and wonderful conversation as we hold dear our friendships and share adventures or concerns. We are hoping to hold our clothing sale one day and the beloved Nativity Walk. But we reach out by baking muffins, providing sandwiches and vitamins to those struggling to even find a roof over their heads. We have Connex and we have the Sunday night Fellowship hours held on Zoom.

But ultimately sharing worship with friends and family and a meal after is a wonderful way of spreading the Good News! News of hope and love and caring and gratitude. A passage from Colossians says: “God’s plan is to make known his secret to his people, this rich and glorious secret that Christ is in you which means that you will share in the glory of God. So, we preach Christ to everyone – with all possible wisdom we teach them in order to bring each one into God’s presence as a mature individual in union. And to repeat part of the scripture reading Paul to Romans 12 9-18: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

So today after the service there are some packets of jam that you can take home either to enjoy yourself or take to someone who needs comfort and caring. I thank Graham for picking up the jam and helping me prepare the packages. I just might buy him some more jam!

Remember to spread the Good News and remember that God offers us the resiliency and resourcefulness to make jam from the bruised fruit of our lives! Amen!