

What is it about bread? The Sacramental Life

Texts: JOHN 6:35, 41-51

Rev. Sharon Smith

Introduction – Sleeping with Bread:

There is a story told about World War II in a small book by the Linn family.

"During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, 'Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow.'"

If I were to give this sermon a title, it would be –
"What is it about bread? Living the sacramental life".

We have heard today about the prophet Elijah, fleeing because of an injustice done to him, emotionally, spiritually and physically exhausted, only to be nourished by the Angels.

We have read about doors that open up the self to renewal and aliveness –
The door of a deep scar,
The door of an old, old story,
The door of nature – the sky and the water
The door of longing and yearning

And we have heard an account of an early Christian community trying to work out why Jesus transformed the First Century Jewish blessing and 'breaking of bread' into something more.

""What is it about bread? And how do we live the sacramental life?"

The early Christian community that preserved the teaching of John – one of Jesus' closest friends – held the central memory of Jesus' abundant generosity of feeding 5000 people as a central sign that Jesus was making visible, the invisible spiritual realms that sustain human life.

And right after this most important sign, Jesus announces: "I am the bread of life."

It is the first time in the fourth gospel, that the divine name--*ego eimi*- "I AM" is linked with a specific earthly element. "I am bread".

This is radicle. For the disciples schooled in the teaching of Torah – “I AM” was an elusive announcement of God, holy, mysterious, transcendent. Given first to Moses at a bush that was on fire but didn’t burn up.

The disciples now, in their teachings and conversations trying to make sense of the accessibility of the spiritual realm, eternity.

To put it a different way, the eternal God became here and now--the essential became existential.

And it didn’t stop with bread – John’s teachings link the ‘divine name’ I AM with:

- Light,
- with a Door,
- with a Good Shepherd,
- with a true Vine.

By John Petty posted on progressive involvement.

As Richard Rohr and Brian McLaren write:

"These moments from Scripture set a stage of expectation and desire that God's presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material, and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions.

"This is "sacramental" theology: where the visible and tactile are the primary doorways to the invisible. This is why each of the formal Sacraments of the church insists on a material element like water, oil, bread, wine, the laying on of hands, or the absolute physicality of marriage itself."

The sacramental principle is this:

"Begin with a concrete moment of encounter, based in this physical world, and the soul universalizes from there, so that what is true here becomes true everywhere else too"

The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe" by Richard Rohr, Brian D. McLaren

If you have a deep scar, that is a door, if you have an old, old story, that is a door. If you love the sky and the water so much you almost cannot bear it, that is a door. If you yearn for a deeper life, a full life, a sane life, that is a door."

If you bless and eat bread together in the name of Christ – that is a door.

One door – for us as followers of Christ, it is the door that is our greatest teacher and leads us to other doors. And this is sacramental living.

Sundays' worship is practice for all of life.

I find Barbara Brown Taylor's words really helpful here:

She writes: " Through the sacraments, we are invited to understand that all the things of this world are good enough to bear the presence of God and to deepen the relationship between heaven and earth.

To glimpse the holiness of ordinary bread or wine or oil or water is to begin to suspect that holiness may be hiding in other things as well.

"Holiness may be lurking inside a green leaf, a clay cup, a clean sheet, a freshly sawn board; it may be just below the surface of a key, a clock, a shiny stone."

To draw a line around the seven sacraments for which the church has rites is to underestimate the grace of God and the holiness of the creation.

According to [Anglican teaching], "God is not limited to these rites; they are patterns of countless ways by which God uses material things to reach out to us."

She goes on to say:

"God reaches out to us in countless ways through the material things of our lives: there are altars everywhere with sacraments just waiting to be discovered and celebrated.

- Anyone who has made annual pilgrimages home for Thanksgiving knows that the dining room table is one such altar, where sacraments of turkey and sweet potato pie evince the grace of a family whose loving of one another may from time to time far exceed their liking.
- A gardener's altar may be his garden, where sacraments of seed and bud contain the grace of God's life-giving power;
- A painter's altar may be her easel, where sacraments of canvas and oil evoke the grace of God's creative genius;
- a parents altar may be their laps, where sacraments of children exhibit the grace of God's love.
- A physician's altar may be her examining room, where sacraments of other people's bodies remind her of her kinship with all creation."

Everyday sacraments — the sacraments of friends, family, home, nature, of work offices and the list goes on.

Barbara Brown Taylor, The Preaching Life

The Rev Emily Scott began an alternative liturgy in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York.

The liturgy centres around the table. And they eat.

This is dinner church...

And at Dinner Church, worship takes place around a big, delicious meal that they cook together. Communion is made as they share food and explore the stories of Jesus, singing and praying together.

They take the sacrament, holy and other, and ground it in the ordinary meal. This is sacramental living.

At Emily's final service at St Lydia's before she moved on, she said these words:

"I've found God in each of your faces, gathered around our tables, waiting and expectant for a small fragment of bread. Like all of us, I've experienced doubt and distance from God. "But you gave me a rare gift: that of certainty." I have sat next to God at the table. She was there each time the bread was broken. I longed for connection. And look what I found."

For All Who Hunger: Searching for Communion in a Shattered World" by Emily M. D. Scott
