

Christian Perspectives: bread for the journey

Summer can be a wonderful time. The kids are out of school, our daily time table is often more relaxed and many of us chose to take our holidays in the embrace of the warm weather.

I remember one particular summer vacation. Our family had rented a cottage on a small island with no running water, no hydro; it was back to basics. We even put our watches away and lived on sun time. We got up with the break of day and went to bed at dusk. We had the gift of time and could let the day unfold. We swam, ate and played just when the spirit moved us. One thing I had promised the kids was that we would have fun learning how to bake bread. Together we mixed the ingredients, greased up the pans and let the dough rise. When it was ready we would take it out of the pan, put it on a floured board and knead the dough in a wonderful rhythmic motion while looking out the screened door watching the sun dance off the top of the waves. The bread making seemed to feed our souls just as the warm buttered bread fed our hunger. That summer we made all kinds of bread, white bread, brown bread, croissant rolls, parker house rolls. Our very most favorite were chelsea buns, hot out of the oven for breakfast. Bread was certainly a staple for us that summer, just as bread has been a staple for most cultures for thousands of years.

In the bible bread is mentioned over 300 times. Perhaps the best known image of bread is when God sends manna from heaven to the Israelites who are in the desert having escaped from slavery in Egypt. It is an image of God's faithfulness to God's people to sustain them both physically and spiritually. They know that God has not abandon them but is with them on their journey.

In the gospel of John we hear Jesus say to his followers 'it is my Father who gives you true bread from heaven to eat. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' [John 6: 32 - 33] In the bible the image of bread is often used as a metaphor to speak of the love and care God wishes to offer to all. It was hard for the people who were part of the feeding of the 5000 to understand the true meaning of the bread that was shared amongst them. [John 6: 1-15] After this feeding the people go searching for Jesus asking for more bread. His response is not what they expected:

'Jesus explained to them, I am the bread of life, no one who comes to me will ever be hungry; no one who believes in me will be thirsty.' (John 6: 35)

Perhaps it can be hard for us to understand this passage. We have heard above that it is the bread from God that gives life to the world. But like Jesus' followers we might well ask where is it that we are fed, where do we receive this bread? For many it is within the church service, in the prayers, the music, the readings, the sermon, and as we receive the bread and wine. The goal of liturgy is that we leave the church with a sense of being fed. In our church we now have The Path- Hiking church. Some folks gather on a Sunday morning to hike together and take in and reflect on their experience in the out doors. Comments such as 'fabulous hike', 'great spiritual experience' and 'felt a strong sense of community and connection' says to me that they are experiencing bread for the journey.

Just as we made many different form of bread that summer at the cottage so our bread for the journey come to us in many different ways. These past five years have been extraordinary within the context of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Many of the former aboriginal students of Residential Schools have for the first time been given a safe and supportive environment in which to share their experience. These opportunities have offered bread for the journey not only for former students but also for those of us who have had the privilege to hear these stories. We have developed a greater understanding of what damage can be done to human beings when they are stripped of family, culture, language and often treated in inhuman ways. This bread offers us food that feeds our hearts to feel compassion and understanding, moving beyond the image of 'the drunken Indian' to the wounded person who has struggled to live life with great courage while wrapped in deep pain and suffering. Another image for some has been the decision of the US court to move on gay marriage. It has come as bread for the journey for many who have longed to have this made possible. Closer to home, the return of the Red Winged Blackbird heard through her song. After a long hard winter it can offer bread for the journey, a song of reassurance that spring is on the way.

There are challenges open to us that can be painful a struggle, and yet in the end feed us with bread for the journey. When we are willing to confront a difficult situation . It might be moving out of a destructive relationship, leaving a job that is life taking, taking a good hard look at the anger we carry around, to work towards reconciliation in broken family relations. The bread may not come in the success but in the willingness to put the energy into the attempt. Another way in which we can receive bread for the journey is when we live life with gratitude. When we give thanks for the country side that surrounds us in this part of the world, the orange day lilies growing by the side of the road mixed in with the brilliant purply pink sweet peas. That scene can feed something deep within. When we have purpose and meaning in our lives, surely then we have been open to receive bread for the journey. The bread making marathon that we had that one summer as I said fed not only our bodies but our spirits. May you search, find and give thanks for the bread you have received for your journey and know you have been blessed by the One who says: 'I am the bread of life'.

Penny Lewis,
Mono Christ Church Bolton