

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Sunday, October 16, 2022

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Rev Dr Scott Couper

“All Things in Common”

First of four in a sermon series entitled “From Bread to Cup to Faith and Giving”

Christian Scripture: Acts 2:42-47



For the beginning of our sermon series entitled “From Bread to Cup to Faith and Giving”, I thought I would shake things up a bit and not tell you three of the *best* jokes about bread I could find. No, instead I decided to tell you three of the *worst* jokes about bread than I could find. Here we go.

Q: What does a loaf of bread say to a friend after doing it a favor? A: It’s the *yeast* I can do. Q: What did a loaf of bread say when breaking-up with his girlfriend? A: You deserve *butter*. And just when you thought they could not get worse, I have the *worst*. Q: Why was the loaf of bread upset? Because his plans kept going *a rye*.

It makes a great deal of sense that we begin our stewardship series by focusing first on bread – for bread is seminal, fundamental, essential, and intrinsic to human civilization, to society, and therefore human relationships. Some days I walk on Main Street, and I see the line out of Yala almost going to the bridge and river! One source says that “Bread has been part of human history for centuries. It plays an integral role in our daily life and is a symbol of culture, history, hunger, wealth, war, and peace. It is indispensable and has been key in human survival. Bread created the structure of modern-day society and gave order to our way of living. Without this seemingly simple food, civilization wouldn’t exist in the way we know it today.”¹ One might say that bread is the building block to community.

Our church is a community. A unique community of faith with a history that almost cannot be told without including the centrality of bread. Therefore, learning about bread seems to be a great place to begin our discernment about what our church means to us and the extent to which we can support it in the future.

From the opening chapters of Genesis when there is only Adam and Eve, the Bible refers to bread (3:19). During the Exodus, the ancient Hebrews had to

¹ Grant’s Bakery, “The Most Important Thing in Human History”, found at: <https://grantsbakery.co.uk/blogs/posts/bread-the-most-important-thing-in-human-history>, accessed October 15, 2022.

depart Egypt so fast that they were instructed to make unleavened bread (Exodus 12:18). Of course, during the wandering in the wilderness, God provided manna, a bread-like substance to fend off starvation (Exodus 16:12).

If we jump to the Christian scriptures, Jesus declares himself the 'Bread of Life' (John 6:22-59). And of course, as we all know, Jesus broke bread at the table with his disciples in the upper room before he was arrested and crucified. We remember Jesus' Last Supper in this church every month (Matthew 26:26). In our scripture reading from Acts this morning, the breaking of bread by the early Christian church was key for the establishment of *koinonia*, or 'fellowship'.² Even at the conclusion of our Bible, in the book of Revelation, it reads, "And I heard a voice from among the four living beings say, 'A loaf of wheat bread or three loaves of barley will cost a day's pay'" (6:6). It seems like the author, John of Patmos, is bemoaning or foretelling the rate of inflation by commenting on the price of bread. In short, we know from the Bible that from a faith perspective, bread is important!

We also learn from the Bible that what is often referred to as 'the kingdom' or the 'realm of God' is a state of affairs wherein all things are 'held in common', sometimes "on Earth just as it is in heaven". This morning's scripture reading from

² William Willimon, *Acts*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for teaching and Preaching*, ed., James Luther Mays (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 40.

Acts describes such a realm within a small Christian community. In this community, all forfeited their private property and contributed it to the common good. Chapter 2, verse 44 reads, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need". This sounds shocking! It sounds like the early Christian community was quintessentially (dare I say it?) 'socialist'. Such an ethic, or such a politic, is in keeping with many other passages of the Bible that describe the kingdom of God as egalitarian, or at least where all are free from want. For example, Deuteronomy describes a promised land free from poverty (15:4-5). The prophet Isaiah described a society that proclaimed, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (55:1). Indeed, Jesus alludes to the 'heavenly banquet' when describing an invitation to wedding feast whereby the least of the least shall partake (Matthew 22). The book of Revelation picks up this theme in its description of the end times when all those who are invited to "the wedding supper of the Lamb" will partake in a kind of cosmic buffet (19:9). The Lord's Supper that we celebrate in November is but a foretaste, an *hors d'oeuvres*, before that great communal feast. Throughout the Bible, bread and everyone having enough to eat are key ingredients of God's salvific plan.

Friends, during our four-week stewardship campaign, we ask ourselves, “What do I, what does Centre Church, have to do with God’s salvific plan?” The answer is quite simple! We are key ingredients to keep the plan going, to bring it to fruition! This whole bread thing started in Genesis. We find it in Deuteronomy. It continued with the prophets like Isaiah. Jesus made bread central. The early Christian church focused on the ‘breaking of the bread’. And Centre Church, the last church on Main Street, continues the 3,000 plus year tradition. We must not let it fizzle and die out!

As you discern how much this church means to you, also discern how much the entire Christian tradition means to you and to our community in Brattleboro. In four weeks, we will submit our pledges on Pledge Sunday (November 13). We have the opportunity to say the ‘breaking of the bread’ at Centre Church matters deeply. Because the Christian tradition continues with us, we respond to the Bible’s proposal that we return, *not necessarily all*, but only ten percent of our income to a community that centers God in our lives (Leviticus 27:30). By tithing ten percent of your income to Centre Church, you contribute to the faithful work of Loaves & Fishes and thus distributing Vermont’s wonderful ‘Everyone Eats’ meals. Your tithe helps to ensure that no one in Brattleboro goes without a meal. Yet, tithing to Centre Church isn’t just about your local community. Tithing is really

about not allowing 3,000 years of biblical history and God's plan for the kingdom to be extinguished. What a wonderful awe-inspiring challenge we all are called to during this stewardship season!

This is the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen".