Vespers

Article about child eating dirt in Living Lutheran… Dec 2017

Or hiking and developing a blister… hobble the whole journey

grains of sand

There is an ancient saying “It is not the mountain that wears a person down… but rather the grain of sand in their sandal.”

There is plenty of sand in the region of Galilee, in the time of Jesus there were scores of beautiful fishing harbors, flocks and shepherds punctuating the fragrant ground between small towns that sat facing one another across the water perfectly placed around the hills descending the gentle slopes to the water’s edge, water that over time wore away the stones on the shore to smooth rounded cobbles, with the help of irritating sand.

In this idyllic setting, there was plenty of irritating sandy reality too… oppressive Roman government wearing-away the will and independence of the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Gritty decrees like the one announcing a census, which everyone knew meant more taxes, and less money to buy daily bread.

Already there were people scrounging the surface of the grains of sand for any morsel, any crumb… just to get by. People so bowed-down with the burdens of survival, they could only see as far as their feet, their basic needs.

For Joseph, his daily needs included providing for himself, his fiancé, and this baby who was already kicking his mother’s womb, strengthening and stretching, just about ready to break the skin holding the water in order to enter the world! And now another grain of sand… a mandatory journey to the place of Bread “Bethlehem”. It’s enough to wear a man down… the neighbors must have been talking about this baby coming before the wedding… having to close the business in order to travel all the way to the home-town of his ancestors… to the place King David’s whole family had called home for generations. Yes, he hailed from the royal family… but now there was only royal pain, toil…

He and Mary set-off on their journey. From the sandy slopes of the region of Galilee… they could lift their eyes to the hills, lifting their sights, above the grains of sand, beyond the hills, to taller mountains, steeper roads… not an easy journey far into a pregnancy… but a familiar one, in a similar direction as the Temple in Jerusalem where they went to offer sacrifices for the Holy days… a place where they lifted up their thanks, their hearts, their hopes… for they believed the words of the angels… One was coming…

{connection}

Like God providing Manna in the wilderness, again The LORD was bringing bread… this time Living Bread from Heaven into the world. For all those scrounging for daily bread… it is coming soon…

Look up a little higher, to the stars… looking so much like glistening grains of sand on a black sandy beach. Look to the maker of bread and heaven and earth. Lift up your heads, lift up your chins, lift up your feet… God is up to something!

{start crouched, closely examining the floor}

There are people in the world, scrounging for bread crumbs

People expending all effort searching

People desperate for nourishment, for life, willing to eat dirt if necessary

To stars pointing way to promise as numerous as stars and grains of sand…

Look up to find the way, then look back down to make the way

And look to Christ to be the way

A journey toward heavenly bread:

Looking down, for tiny crumbs to meet immediate need.

Divine call,

*Start here*

Many of you have already been on a journey, to get here today. There were rides to share, walks to shovel, planes to catch, and prayers said along each step of the way…

Many of you have already been on a journey to get here today. There was music to learn, practices to attend, schedules to juggle, tending to instruments, and prayers said along each step of the way…

Mary and Joseph were already on a journey to get to where we are today. There were neighbor’s talking throughout the hill country of Judea, there was the decreed census with a threat of new taxes looming from the oppressive Roman government and Joseph would be out of work while they journeyed back to his ancestral home town of Bethlehem. There was a long-slow trip with a woman about to give birth, and prayers said along each step of the way… the way to Bethlehem, literally the House of Bread.

Maybe the most difficult journey of all, was not any of those yet mentioned… maybe the journey is about the distance covered as a relationship comes into being… a relationship between the Divine Bread Maker and those of us who are loved and fed. relationship is born

O Henry wrote a short story which could give an insight about this journey of our relationship to the Heavenly Bread Maker. In his story the Bread Maker is a 40-year-old, financially stable, single woman, with 2 false teeth, and a sympathetic heart. She keeps the little bakery on the corner, where a middle-aged customer, wearing spectacles, and a carefully trimmed beard has caught her interest. He comes in, making the bell on the door twinkle it’s chime 2 or 3 times a week, speaking the language with a strong foreign accent, his clothing is worn, baggy and darned in places, but he looked neat and had very good manners. He always bought 2 loaves of stale bread. Fresh bread was 5 cents a loaf; stale ones were 2 loaves for 5 cents. He never asked for anything else.

She thought of him as she ate each of her well-balanced meals, and thought he began to look thinner and discouraged. He had stained fingers one day, and she discovered his artistic ability… thinking to herself, how her financial stability, plenty of food, and a sympathetic heart could be a wonderful match with his artistic genius. But She never spoke of her growing love for him, although she started to wear her best clothing, and use a compound for her complexion. He started holding longer conversations with her.

One day, after about 3 months of this, when he was distracted in the bakery, she slipped a generous amount of butter into the center of his order of stale bread and wrapped it up before he discovered the gift. She could hardly contain her fluttering heart, imagining the scene of his joy as he prepared for his meal of dry bread and water. Would he think of her hand as he ate? Would he –

She had no more time to dream of the immense and countless joys her gift of love had initiated…

The front door bell jangled viciously, and someone was making a big, loud, commotion! Two men entered, she only recognized the elder but, he was furious! Shouting insults at her and banging on the counter, he shouted many things I won’t repeat here… including ‘you have ruined me!’ Then the younger man, dragged the angry one outside. The younger man then returned inside to explain, the elder man is an architectural draftsman, who has been working hard for 3 months drawing a plan for a new city hall for a prize competition. A draftsman always makes his drawing in pencil and then inked the lines, which he finished yesterday. When the ink dries and he’s done, he rubs-out the pencil lines with handfuls of stale bread crumbs which are better than an eraser. He’s been buying the bread here… and butter isn’t – well… the draft is no good for anything now.

Like that baker with the sympathetic heart, God loves us deeply. The journey of relationship over time brings conversation, and care, compassion and provision. Sometimes people are nourished and recognize this divine love as Bread of Life.

Other times… people do not even attempt to eat the bread… instead we have other uses for the Bread of Heaven. We prefer the bread of Heaven, stale, crumbled, for use on our own plans, for our own purposes rather than God’s intended purpose.

This year as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Bread of Life, in a little town called House of Bread, a little town of Bethlehem… Consider this relationship journey; consider the deep and abiding love of the Divine Bread Maker, knowing us so well as to know the number of hairs on each head {tie with ealier}… willing to go to extraordinary lengths to feed us, and love us and know us… Many of us have already been on a journey, to get here today. Was thanks to God for the yearning to be together as community part of the journey? Was celebration of the diverse God-given gifts part of the preparation? If we were to look deep in our hearts, are these divine gifts being used as God intended… or are some of the Divine Bread Maker’s daily bread gifts crumbled-up and discarded as disposable rather than indispensable?

Prayers said along each step of the way… that as we journey toward Heavenly Bread we will recognize, embrace and digest the remarkable Love in which the Living Bread from Heaven is freely given to us, in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*End here*

As an adult, Jesus taught “I Am the bread of life” (John 6:48) and “I am the **living** **bread** that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this **bread** will live forever; and the **bread** that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6:51)

So I’ve been thinking a lot about bread… I even remember a time growing-up in a household of 6… where we argued and raced for the best part of the bread… the crust! As a hungry seminary student 20 years ago, when I learned in Hebrew class that Bethlehem meant… Place of bread or house of bread; I remembered fighting for the crust… and a new deep understanding dawned:

Jesus was born and laid in a manger, a food trough for animals. How ironic that the Living Bread of Heaven would be placed in a food trough… right after his birth. And again right before his death, his body was the bread, that takes away the sin of the world; broken for you and for me. The entire earthly life of Jesus Christ our Lord, is one of feeding all those who hunger in very physical ways, and those who hunger in very spiritual ways. No joke!

But it is not yet, Christmas, we are not yet at the birth, we are not yet seeing the whole loaf of God in Christ Jesus… for now at ‘yeast’ we have messengers, the Word rising, with John baptizing in the waters proclaiming it is time to repent, the kingdom of God has come near.

Some people wonder if John is a joke, clothed in camel hair, likely smelling strongly of the wilderness. Some wonder if John’s parents were a joke, and their relatives… saying that angels brought messages to earth. Elizabeth?, Zechariah?, Mary?, Joseph? Were the angels joking? Son of the Most High, filling the vacated Throne of David after hundreds of years, born to an engaged young girl?? And now shepherds being visited by a heavenly host? They’ve got to be joking!

So, to get us in the joking mood, since so many aspects of the world around us are no laughing matter… I went to the internet and got a few jokes about Bread, since Bethlehem literally means House of Bread, and Jesus is the Living Bread from heaven… {*besides we could all use a good laugh after the effort of the journey to get here today*:}

Q: What did the bag of flour say to the loaf of bread? A: "I saw you yeast-erday"

Q: Why doesn't bread like warm weather? A: Things get Toasty!

Q: Why are bread jokes always funny? A: Because they never get mold!

Q: What do bakers give women on special occasions? A: Flours

Q: Why doesn't anyone want to work in a bakery? A: It's a crumby place to work.

~~Q: What Kind of Bagels Can Fly? A: Plain Ones~~

Q: What did the butter say to the bread? A: I'm on a roll!   
  
Q: What do you call holy bread? A: Jesus Crust![[1]](#footnote-1) No wonder I always loved the crust best!  
  
And Jesus certainly is Holy Bread, in fact he is the Living Bread from heaven, our host on earth and in heaven. Like bread which is so ordinary and basic that sometimes we don’t even think about what an incredible gift it is in our lives. … Jesus can get overlooked too, Jesus also can be under-appreciated, a popular phrase to hiss through clenched teeth when exasperated, Jesussss… Chrisssst… but as sustenance, as savior Jesus Christ can be overlooked & and under digested.

Ordinary, just like any other person in a crowd… The Living Bread of Heaven was not born in a palace, did not sit on a throne, was not even surrounded by people of social status; instead he came in the flesh incarnate, living among us, Immanuel ‘God with us.’ Wrinkly, crying, completely vulnerable, and dependent on a young first-time mother and her fiancé, a carpenter.

Rather unremarkable, … this Living Bread from heaven, is like daily bread for anyone who has enough to eat. But for a hungry person, each and every **crumb** is precious.

I hope and fervently pray that we will be hungry… Physically hungry enough to deeply appreciate the food that nourishes and satisfies And more-over … spiritually hungry enough to search for every morsel of this Living bread, Jesus the Christ!

The shepherds were spiritually hungry enough to believe those terrifying angels with their glorious message of the newborn king! Imagine if they were not hungry enough to believe… imagine if they did not have that drive to make the journey into town, to find the lowly infant with Mary and Joseph… without their appetite for the Divine mystery… there would have been no joyful witness of Joy to the world!

And people who are this hungry… tell others where to find this Living Bread that is forever! In fact people who are this motivated might even be willing to fighting for the crust… Jesus ‘Chrust’. I don’t mean with fists, and cunning, and hurtful words… I mean fighting for Jesus Chrust… taking a bite out of injustice; toasting intolerance; grilling greed… while being fed by the Bread of life, with scripture, with a rich faith-life, and Holy Communion!

Be hungry. Like Jacob the heel-grabber… go for the crust… Jesus Crust. The true Living Bread of Heaven… the one who provides our Daily Bread, and delivers us from evil… may the Almighty guide us and feed us on our journey as individuals (crumbs) and a broader community (loaf)… May the Almighty keep us from loafing around and instead, serve us as bread to the hungry, hope to the hopeless, and justice to the oppressed. After all, we are the Body of Christ in the world today… and when does bread rise?, when you **yeast** expect it!

1. source: <http://www.jokes4us.com/miscellaneousjokes/foodjokes/breadjokes.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)