

The Bread

A World Communion Sunday Meditation
Rev. Dan Schumacher

“While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’”
—Mark 14:22

Bread is as ordinary a symbol as most anyone could possibly imagine.

This morning for breakfast, I had a piece of toast with my egg – like I do most every morning.

Bread is so ordinary that at most sit down restaurants, they give you bread for free. They don’t put it on the menu and charge you for it. It literally comes out in basket with your free water. At *Olive Garden*, they’ll let you eat as many breadsticks as you can get down your gullet. That’s how ordinary bread is.

And yet, Jesus picked up a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it...

With one simple gesture, Jesus turned the most ordinary food in the world into a sacrament – a means of imparting grace on us. He took the bread and *broke* it...

The truth is, we are all broken in some way that’s beyond our ability to repair. We all bear the scars for some wound that just never seems to fully heal.

When we were kids, my brothers and I loved collecting and playing with action figures – particularly G.I. Joes and, of course, Ninja Turtles. But we were rough and tumble young boys who were hard on things. We’d throw our Ninja Turtles way up in the air and let them hit the ground with a thud. We’d tie a string around their wrist and hang them out the back window of the car as we drove down the highway. We’d line them up across the yard and see how many we could knock over with pebbles shot from our homemade slingshots.

And, then, we’d act utterly shocked when one of those plastic arms or legs would break off. So we’d go to dad in tears and beg him to repair it, and dad would get out the super glue and glue arms and legs back in place for us. To this day, I have a bin full of old action figures with arms and legs that no longer move, because they had to be glued back on.

I suspect that life has done a similar number to many of us. The tragic and unexpected death of a loved one. The abuse we suffered in secret at the hands of someone who was supposed to love us. The betrayal of a close friend. The abandonment of a community

of faith over what we believe. The loss of a job. The word, “cancer.” The addiction. The depression. The loneliness. Whatever it is, we have all been broken and wounded.

The Catholic Priest, Richard Rohr, says this: “If we don’t let God transform our pain, we will inevitably transmit it.”

What he means is that if we don’t surrender our pain to God, we will pass it on to someone else. We will take it out on someone else — someone who doesn’t deserve it — and thus we become complicit in adding more brokenness to the world.

The image of Jesus breaking the bread points forward to when Jesus’ body would be broken on the cross. “Take,” he says, “this is my body.” But Jesus refused to pass the pain on to others. Instead, the story of his broken body is the story of how he surrendered his pain to God, so that it could be transformed into redemption. The easter story tells us that what the world broke, God redeemed.

The great preacher, Fred Craddock, died a few years ago now. In his later years, he was fond of saying, “When I was in my late teens, I wanted to be a preacher. When I was in my late twenties, I wanted to be a good preacher. Now that I am older, I want more than anything else to be a Christian. To live simply, to love generously, to speak truthfully, to serve faithfully, and leave everything else to God.”

Maybe you know a little bit about Fred. Maybe you don’t. But as faithful and gentle and devoted a minister as Fred was, he did not grow up with a Christian father. He said:

“My mother took us to church and Sunday school; my father didn’t go. He complained about Sunday dinner being late when she came home. Sometimes the preacher would call, and my father would say, ‘I know what the church wants. Church doesn’t care about me. Church wants another name, another pledge, another name, another pledge. Right? Isn’t that the name of it all? Another name, another pledge.’ That’s what he always said.

Sometimes we’d have a revival. Pastor would bring the evangelist and say to the evangelist, ‘There’s one now, sic him, get him, get him,’ and my father would say the same thing: ‘The church doesn’t care about me. The church wants another name and another pledge.’ I guess I heard it a thousand times,” said Craddock.

“One time he didn’t say it. He was in the veteran’s hospital, and he was down to seventy-three pounds. They’d taken out his throat, and said, ‘It’s too late.’ They put in a metal tube, and X rays burned him to pieces. I flew in to see him. He couldn’t speak, couldn’t eat.

I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the windowsills, a stack of cards twenty inches deep beside his bed. And even that tray where they put food, if you can eat, on that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church.

He saw me read a card. He could not speak, so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare. If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story," says Craddock.

"He wrote: 'In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story.'

I said, 'What is your story, Daddy?'

And he wrote, 'I was wrong' (*Craddock Stories*, 14).

You see church — the bread isn't just bread. It is the symbol that proclaims that what the world breaks, God restores... if we will let him.

Amen.