

“Jesus’ Bread of Life was Mostly Whole Wheat” by Ron Krayibill

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Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

Prolegomenon

(The ghost of my grandfather haunts me)

My grandfather was a revival preacher and I grew up in a Mennonite Church in PA where revivalists came thru every year. That tradition placed in me an expectation of faith and God and those who “bring the word” that is hard to shake. There should be inspiration and emotion and an outpouring of energy and zeal.....

I lived a good portion of my life guided by the assumptions of that tradition – not in agreeing with all the dogma but in my expectations of God and life and of myself. The one who “brings the message” should bring something new and inspiring and transformational.

So as the date of my scheduled time to speak approached, I have been in a bit of a quandary. The legacy of my past believes that I will step before you with the mantle of the Lord on my shoulders, and that in preparation I should be

seeking a mighty “Word from the Lord”. Yet the honest and self-aware part of me knows full well that if that modality ever worked for me, it doesn’t work right now. I am too unsettled in too many ways, too full of questions and doubts, too full of wounds and disappointments, to *channel* the voice of the Lord.

So with a certain dread I delayed my preparation until I could no longer delay, and with a sense of anxiety sat down with the lectionary. And was greatly comforted, in a few minutes, to realize that there is a new modality that actually works for me, even in this time. The lectionary is not a lecture – it is more like a library, an archive, a quilt, a puzzle. It doesn’t present neatly tied up answers or unified speeches. It is a mosaic that invites commentary.

As I prepared to speak to you in response to the lectionary, I realize that the question I am asking myself is not focused inwardly on “what is the message God is placing in my heart?” but rather on “where in these texts – and out there in the world – do I notice what seems to be the work of God in the world?”

This is a posture that fits with who I am in my 60s, when the energy I bring to the world is different than when I was 30. I think it also fits better in the world we live in, where thoughtful people all know that we are bombarded hourly with powerful messages seeking to drive us to someone else’s agenda, and we are instinctively skeptical about loud voices. My hope is not to be the messenger of a ringing call to action, but to bear witness to what echoes within me from what I observe out there.

So

– Solomon, the one noted for wisdom, is overwhelmed with his inadequacy. He confesses this to God and God says, you know, people usually ask for riches, and power, and a long-life.

Because you are self-less and ask only for wisdom in serving your people, I will give it to you. And I will give you all the other nice things most people ask for. Grandpa Kraybill believed that this happened literally – I take this as the bearing of witness of the Hebrew people that God honors humility and modesty and devotion to the needs of other. No, it is more than saying that God likes this, it seems to be saying that in the economy of God, humility and modesty and dedication to service are the actually the keys to wealth and longevity as a leader. (Would someone please pass word of that to all those supposedly Bible reading politicians lining up for the US election?)

– Bread of life. Hold this alongside Jesus' comment, "I am the bread of life". What a rich image! How do we take it? My grandfather took a very high view of Jesus. For him, Jesus stood completely apart from other human beings; he was the sinless One, sent from God on a long fore-ordained mission. Anyone who does not partake of this Holy Bread of life will perish in eternal fires.

But the interesting thing is that this very high view of Jesus is not one that Jesus himself seems to have held. Numerous accounts find him resistant to those eager to name him the Messiah. The titles he mostly commonly used to refer to himself was Son of Man or Son of God, which refer to someone with a special relationship with God.

There is nothing to suggest that Jesus himself had any intentions to start a new religion or to make himself the center of attention. Rather the evidence suggests he saw himself as a prophet calling people to awaken to the reign of God and that its marks were new life, hope, and peace for those who were rejected, hungry, sad, and worried.

So Bread of Life seems to me to fit well with this tradition of Jesus, the modest healer. When Jesus called himself the Bread of Life, he probably didn't mean, you better eat a slice

of cosmic magic or you will die, but rather, come and pull up a chair and partake of a simple feast on the things that really matter, and BTW, the things that really matter are not the things that the high and mighty and pious think matter.

What does it mean for us to be a community of worship that understands God, reality, and ourselves in this way?

– Recalling the OT passage about modesty of leaders as a mark of desired quality in the economy of God, , **I bear witness here** to the modesty of leadership that is at the heart of the Seekers community. Leadership is shared, by many. No one anointed leader rises week after week to give his or her interpretation of things; all share the burden of listening for and presenting their understanding of guidance. Peter was the closest thing this church had to an anointed leader and he recently removed himself – an example of high leadership in its own right not clinging to the role.

– Everyone understands that there are many favorite recipes for bread. People don't feel a need to get others to adopt their own recipe. I bear witness to the embrace of diversity at Seekers, of family types, relationship types, gender types, racial types, and I think, theology types. I am sure that there must be rigidities and intolerances here somewhere, but I've not met many yet.

– I bear witness to sharing of bread I experience 3 times a month with the Peace and Justice Mission Group. I've been in numerous small groups over the years and find the structure and focus of this group one of the simplest I've been in. We pray in a very slow and quiet way, with many silent spaces, we eat, and then have a fairly short discussion time.

– I experience in the core of my life a deep hunger for connection to God and life and freedom from the anxiety that comes with living and growing old in a world of rapid change. Sometimes I wish I could embrace the theology of my

Grandpa Kraybill because it gives such simple answers. I think I thought that hunger and anxiety would get less as I grew older but I think I would say I find the opposite to be true. But I bear witness that in a strange way, I find the bread of this community of tradition more satisfying than ever. My grandpa loved to go to church, something that I couldn't understand at all when I was young, but do now. I bear witness to my experience that Sunday after Sunday, when I come home from this place, I feel more grounded and at rest, more connected to the things that really matter, more confident that God is at work in the world. Very simply, I feel fed.

There is something else yet to bear witness to. For a number of years I have practiced in short and not very disciplined ways, the use of mindfulness meditation, whose purpose is the silencing of the ceaseless chatter of the restless mind, so that we can encounter the sweet awareness that rises to meet us as soon as we bring our attention to the here and now. This is much harder to do and much more rewarding than it sounds. I am far from a disciplined practitioner, but I have dabbled enough to be awed and to want more. I bear witness to the power of simple awareness, of removing ourselves from dramas, pretences, and ambitions, and simply resting in the astonishing power of Now. I bear witness to the compatibility of this modality of awareness with the teachings of Jesus – I experience this as Bread of Life and I hunger for more.