



TOUCH POINT

The Tortilla of Life – Touchpoint for August 7, 2024

John 6:35,41-51 (NRSVUE) Jesus the Bread of Life

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ 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.”

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

I remember when I was very young, we would make our long trip to Betania Presbyterian Church from West Phoenix to downtown Phoenix on the I-17. It was a 30-minute drive that seemed to take forever, especially with no AC during the heat of summer.

Every Sunday, while on the freeway, something would always halt any bickering or boredom. It was the aroma of fresh baked bread from the nearby Holsum Bakery, a huge bread company that supplied all the stores in the Valley and was situated on our route to church.

The warm fragrance of dozens of loaves baking simultaneously seemed to drift through the air like an entrancing trail in a Looney Toons cartoon, from the ovens, through the sky and into our car. “Hmmm, do you smell that?,” one of us would shout, and we would sink into a collective deep inhale. Bread baking tamed even the youngest, me.

In our family, tortillas were as much a staple as Holsum Bread was to other families. When groceries ran low, a lot could be made with the basics of milk, flour, butter, eggs and a well-stretched protein. The smell of a fresh batch of tortillas was like driving past the bakery, only we ate them.

How silly it would be if someone said, “Hey do you believe in tortillas?” Do I believe in tortillas? “Dude, I eat tortillas, I don’t think about them! I smell them, wrap food in them, butter them, scoop food with them, crisp them with cheese etc., etc.”

When this miracle-performing Jesus’s identity was in question, many wondered if Jesus was Elijah, or one of the prophets. “Well,” Jesus says to the disciples, “I am the bread of life!” For us, maybe it would be “I am the tortilla of life!”

It was about how the bread satisfied the soul, not just the physical body. By saying, "I am the bread of life," Jesus shifts the thinking from a belief system about who he is to an experience of himself as bread.

If Jesus were bread, it would be silly to ask, "Do you believe in bread?" In the same way, asking if you believe in Jesus is just as silly if he is bread. Once Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," we are invited to the experience.

It is to be consumed, tasted, enjoyed, and shared. Eating bread and doing it in remembrance of Jesus's engagement with others moves the practice out of believing and into experiencing. We remember how Jesus engaged with people of all walks of life, both the self-indulgent and the poor. There was enough bread of life for the hungry heart.

Bread as a contemplative practice

If the act of eating bread must be believed as a symbol, a transubstantiated truth, a transaction, or an act of obedience, then it is more valuable to religious law keepers. If bread eating is merely to sustain our physical existence, then it is a daily routine. But if we take seriously the invitation to consume this life for more than physical existence, then we will experience what the psalmist proclaimed, "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

At the time of Jesus, Roman culture was highlighted by extravagance, so much so that Gordon Ramsay might be lucky to be a busboy. It is said that new thrills were coveted because their bellies were full, but their hearts were desperately hungry. No amount of the world's delicacies and riches could satisfy the deep hunger for a meaningful and abundant life.

We say, "Give us this day our daily bread." Give us the bread which draws like a savory aroma wafting on our route.

Jesus put his command in one sentence: "Don't work for the food which perishes but for that which lasts forever and gives eternal life."

The Prophet Isaiah said, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Isaiah 55:2.

William Barclay says, "There are two kinds of hunger. There is physical hunger which physical food can satisfy; but there is a spiritual hunger that food can never satisfy. A man may be as rich as Croesus and still have an incompleteness in his life.

There is a deep hunger for ultimate truth, genuine love, and a fulfilling life. The Bread of Life is the only source that can satisfy the human heart and soul."

Jesus's point was that all they (the five thousand seeking more bread and the extravagant culture) were interested in was physical satisfaction. They had received an unexpectedly free and lavish meal; and they still wanted more. But there are other hungers which can be satisfied only by the bread of life. There is the hunger for truth – in him alone is the truth of God. There is the hunger for life – in him alone is life more abundant. There is the hunger for love – in him alone is the love that outlasts sin and death. Christ alone can satisfy the hunger of the human heart and soul. (Paraphrased from William Barclay)

As a man in recovery from bulimia, I can tell you of the unrelenting desire to be satiated... avoiding the fear of being deprived, thereby nurturing a relationship with food that is a dopamine blanket of comfort. Food that disappoints as a substitute for loss, leaving an emptiness for the real hunger and thirst of the soul. For others it is a beverage that allows a temporary chemical remedy for a thirsty soul. When it finally satisfies the body, the soul is weakened and the Spirit weeps with you. For us the words, "Whoever eats this bread will never hunger or thirst again," is huge!

As bread was for the people in the Bible, the tortilla symbolized all the lovely moments of family that left abruptly from our lives or never had time to grow. It did not symbolize poverty; it represented the fullness of intimacy and a gathering together as family.

Bread is an essential provision providing nourishment for the body, but also sharing, and togetherness. Unleavened, it represented sincerity and truth and an exit from all earthly attachments. In communion it represents a remembering that our daily bread and cup surrenders all attachments. Substitutes that fall short of the oneness of body soul and spirit with God. A family celebration of life.

It ushers in the reminder of the God bond, where our feelings of aloneness are comforted by the fragrance of what God is baking in our anxious wait.

"Take, eat and drink, this is my body which has been given to you. May the bread and the cup shared be the reminder that I am with you always. Don't be surprised if you see me setting the table amid the negative voices which appear as enemies. The bread of life will calm the soul where fear and vengeance resided. The table is not set to taunt, but to provide the aroma of inner peace and an invitation to the unlikely."

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Hearken to My Voice

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face". Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, O Lord, and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you. His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you. His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.