

A Sermon by the Rev. Roger Wm. Smith on Maundy Thursday, April 21, 2011 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

## A Sermon about bread

Text: The Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me..." I Corinthians 11:24

+ In the Name of God....

When we take a loaf of bread into our hands we are holding a lot of history. Before that bread reaches us, someone must bake it, package it, market it, transport it, price it, and put it on the shelf in some sort of shop.

But before that, someone had to clear the land, till the soil, plant the seed, harvest the grain, thresh the wheat, transport it to the mill, and make the flour.

These things include the full spectrum of our political, economic and social structure. It includes such things as farm price subsidies, labor unions, the truckers and the lobbyists, the regulations of the food and drug administration; not to mention the sweat—and, yes, come times the blood and tears—of honest labor.

Along side these things, of course, are the wheeling and dealing, the greed and exploitation that so characterizes the politics and commerce of human society.

All of that history is baked into this single loaf of bread.

No doubt a loaf of bread baked in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century was just as tainted by the sweat and sleaze of the world as one baked today. Surely Jesus must have known that. He was acutely aware of the pain and hunger—both physical and spiritual—that mark life in this world.

Such is also true of the bread we offer in the Eucharist. There is a lot of human history baked into those little loaves that we place on the Lord's Table. When we give thanks over this bread and it is received by God, this bread is made new. It is cleansed of all the unclean stuff that was baked into it.

Then when that happens, we break the bread, just as Jesus did with his disciples that night long ago. In the breaking of the bread, two very important things happen: (1) It is broken so that we might recognize the Risen Christ present among us, and (2) it is broken so that he might share it with us and we with one another.

The French theologian Louis Evely has written of this:

"You do not go to the Eucharist to serve God;  
You go to learn how God breaks bread,  
so that you can go and do it the same way,

because God is known in the breaking of bread..."

This is because the broken loaf can be shared by many. It brings nourishment to the bodies and spirits of hungering humanity.

And we discover in this not a God who hangs around keeping us in a state of constant religious euphoria... No, we're talking about a God—who vanishes. He leaves the distribution of his bread up to us!

As we leave the table, go out the door, and get into our cars, we are re-entering a famished world, waiting to be fed by the bread from God. We are sent out to do the work God has given us to do. Having been nourished by this bread ourselves, we are to distribute it. We are to show forth the love and compassion of Christ among all those with whom we will share the days ahead. Share it with our neighbors, many of whom are physically and spiritually hungry. This whole world is perishing from starvation, exploitation, abuse and neglect. We hear the cry of anguish in the streets of Baghdad, Kabul, Jerusalem, Detroit, Los Angeles, and even beautiful Beaufort. God has entrusted the mission of breaking the bread of life and sharing it, in order to make him known.

Two years ago on Easter Sunday Headley and I went to the Eucharist in St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City. We were given a folder headed with the words "Welcome to St. Bartholomew's, Easter A.D. 2008." Of themselves, they have written:

"We are a community that is a colorful tapestry of faith, weaving together both believers and seekers. We say we are loose around the edges and solid at the core. By that we mean we hold to the fullness of the Christian faith as we have received it, and we try to practice the radical welcome learned by the first disciples. Jesus rejected judgmental religion, believing everyone had a right to a relationship with God and a welcome in the community. So we believe."

We believe that God is the loving and purposeful Creator of the universe. We believe that in Jesus Christ, God gave us a singularly lavish gift to humankind. That in Christ, God makes real the promise of reconciliation of all. That the Church is the living reality of that reconciling love in the world, and therefore the Church is to welcome all persons. That the Holy Spirit of God is active and alive today. That the Church—God knows—is not perfect. That there are no easy answers. That getting the questions right takes time and help, and that the right questions are themselves a gift. That regular worship and prayer in community with others really changes lives. That, with God's help, we are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. That we are called to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. And that it is a joyful privilege to invite you to join us in the journey toward this faith...

At the center of each day, we celebrate the Holy Eucharist (Communion or Mass), which in our tradition is the principle act of Christian worship... and through the sharing of holy food and drink, we respond thankfully to God's love for us in Jesus Christ."

Amen.