

TFTD L21 The bread that we break

Monday April 4th



This week's theme for Thought for the Day is the breaking of bread:

Acts 2.42/46 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ... Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the Temple, breaking bread from house to house and sharing their food with glad and generous hearts.

You'll have noticed that we're circling around these same few verses from Acts ch.2, unpicking the threads that held the church together and helped it to grow in those first critical weeks. And — surprise, surprise — those are the same threads that have held the church together ever since — the warp and weft of the Christian life, if you like. So how does the breaking of bread fit in? Why is it so important? And what does it mean to us today?

Looking forward from Acts, we can see in those few words the germ of what has become the central act of worship in many of our churches today. It has many different names: Holy Communion; the Lord's Supper;

the Eucharist; the Mass. It can take place in a grand basilica in Rome with gorgeous music, candles, and incense — or by a hospital bed with quiet words whispered to a dying patient. It can be a noisy family service with children running around — or a quiet service of believers meeting behind locked doors.

But fundamentally, it's the same thing. We can see the basic elements already in Acts ch.2: God's people meeting together to hear the word of God (the apostles' teaching); to share fellowship with one another; to pray together; and to break bread together. A very simple act that works in so many different ways you'd need a whole lifetime to explore them (the church has been doing this for a couple of millennia and hasn't exhausted them yet!). So here are just a few thoughts for starters ...

The breaking of bread is a way of saying: welcome. Let's share this together. Large loaves (like the ones in my photo from Jerusalem) are made to be shared — you sit down, you break the bread, you share it around the table. And in some mysterious way, by sharing in the one loaf, you become one with the people you share with — it's a wonderful symbol of what fellowship means. It's like Paul says in his letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor 10.17): So we being many are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one loaf.

So breaking bread together is an instinctive way of actualizing what fellowship means. It's fellowship made practical, physical, material: fellowship rooted in the material world. And we find the first Christians getting together in that kind of way all over the book of Acts. Breaking bread from house to house in Jerusalem, and sharing their food with glad and generous hearts. Meeting in an upstairs tenement on the third floor in Troas, on the coast of modern Turkey just across the straits from Istanbul (Acts 20.7-12). That was a meeting of Christian believers on the first day of the week — so already a Sunday thing. (Pity the sermon went on till midnight ...!) But it could be in much less comforting surroundings — like when Paul took bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all, broke it, and began to eat in Acts 27.35. That was on board ship, in the middle of a shipwreck, surrounded by Roman soldiers and pagan sailors.

That idea of the breaking of bread as a symbol of fellowship draws on very ancient traditions of hospitality. But Paul says something more surprising in 1 Corinthians 10.16 (extra surprising, when you consider that when he wrote this letter, the church had only been going about 20 years): The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? So we being many are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one loaf. (The word for 'sharing' and the word for 'fellowship' are the same word in Greek: koinonia. It also means 'communion' or 'community' — hence 'Holy Communion'.)

Sharing bread connects us together, yes — that's quite easy to grasp. But sharing in Jesus' body and blood? What does that mean? I think it tells us that right from the start, when the first Christians met together for the breaking of bread, they were doing something that connected them with Jesus. The breaking of bread was something that helped them to understand the meaning of his death: it took them back to the upper room, on the night before he died, when Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, and said, This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me (1 Corinthians 11.24).

Maybe it was the act of breaking the bread that helped them to understand that when Jesus died, it was somehow for you: bread has to be broken in order to be shared, just like the grain of wheat which has to 'die' in the ground before it can grow and bear fruit (John 12.24). But it was more: because the breaking of the bread was also something that made them realize that Jesus was alive, was still with them, that death hadn't had the last word. It wasn't just a symbol of Jesus' death — it was a sign of his resurrection. Not just Good Friday, but Easter too — in fact, the whole Christian story is contained in that one simple action. Wow!

**Enough for today! We'll be exploring this some more in this week's TFTD — and of course in the upcoming services for Holy Week and Easter.
God bless,
Loveday**

HOLYHABITS

The last of our CHURCHES TOGETHER LENT GROUPS will be meeting to explore this further on Monday evening (7.30 pm @ St Philip & St James) and Thursday afternoon (2.30 pm @ AEMC) this week, led by the Revd Rod Hill from AEMC. Do come along if you can. Or if you can't come in person but would like the discussion notes, just let me know and I'll add you to the list.

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