

Bread of Life

- food for the world; breaking bread, social action and mission

PASSION AND PROTECTION

Centripetal and centrifugal

The Peacemeal is the centrepiece of sharing the good news of Jesus and *shalom*. It is both 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal':

Breaking bread is centripetal: (Lit: 'to seek the centre', or 'drawn towards the centre'). Jesus said that when he was lifted up he would 'draw all things to himself'.¹ The hungry came to him in droves and he fed them. This is the meal in which a deep personal encounter with the risen Jesus takes place. This meal draws us to him, both personally and collectively; it is the hub around which the church forms.

▪ Table of Sanctuary

➤ Place of protection:

- A safe place ... a space for asylum seekers
- Bedouin lore - all strangers at table are protected by the life of the host
- 'Prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies' (Ps 23:5)
- Horns of the altar for safety (cf 1Kg 1:50)
- Jesus throws the evil one out (Gk *ekballo*)

Breaking bread is centrifugal: (Lit: 'to flee the centre', or 'dispersed from the centre'). Jesus broke bread and blessed it, and shared it out to the hungry world. In the same way the Christian practice of the Peacemeal must feed all those who are both physically and spiritually hungry. This is a 'missionary meal'; from it we are sent out into the world with the good news of *shalom*, drawing people back towards the table as a place of encounter.

▪ Table of Proclamation

➤ Missionary meal:

- The Mass - Lat *missio* - 'to send' out into the world
- 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'
- Invitation to evangelism, "Come, for all is now ready" (Lk 14:17)
- 'Proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes' (1Cor 11:26)
- 'Highways and hedges and bring them in' (Lk 14:23)
- Jesus' table-fellowship
- 'Eats with tax collectors and sinners' (Lk 15:2)
- Gatecrashers - woman at Simon the Pharisee's house (Lk 7:30-50)
- Celtic tradition - 'share bread with a stranger on the way home'

These are the creative dynamics that lie at the heart of the Peacemeal. Drawing in people that are damaged, broken and in despair, working with them to find wholeness in whatever way it is needed, then journeying with them as they make their way into their communities and circumstances once again to work together to see them changed.

¹ See Jn 12:32



Caravanserai: journey community

Sweeping across the vast landscape of Asia, and extending into both north Africa and eastern Europe, are ancient trade routes; most now long forgotten and unused, slowly disintegrating like a footprint in the wind. Once, however, they were arteries of life, threading for tens of thousands of miles across the open spaces of rock, sand and desert that separated so many of the numerous scattered communities and cultures of by-gone days. These numerous routes, like the legendary 'Silk Road', brought silks and spices to the west along with treasures like jewels and gold. They were filled with a sense of mystery; other people, other places, a journey and a destination.

Because of the extreme exposure of these routes and the danger they presented, time saw secure shelters built; usually about a day's journey apart, all along these ancient roads. They were called *caravanserai*, a Persian word formed from the idea of 'an enclosed courtyard (shelter) for a company of travelers'.² They were usually rectangular buildings with a strong wall and a single secure entrance large enough for a laden camel to enter through. The courtyard was open to the sky and at its center is usually a well with fresh water for people and animals. Around the walls of the enclosure there were alcoves for the travelers to rest and sleep.³ For the wayfarer the *caravanserai* offered:

- **Hospitality**, a warm welcome; quite literally fire, food and drink. Nourishing the body and the spirit. Recouping energy. A place to rest and relax after the struggle of the road. Surrounded by strong walls giving protection from cold winds and ruthless bandits.⁴
- **Community**, a sense of camaraderie must have filled the space. People supporting each other both practically and emotionally as they struggled across harsh and challenging terrain. Shared skills to bind a wound, mend a saddle, diagnose a sick camel, and more. Friendships re-kindled from past meetings and long separations.
- **Diversity**, travellers from many backgrounds and cultures; many would be traders, others pilgrims, migrants, the occasional soldier with a prisoner, and simply strangers with their own unspoken secrets. From the orient and sub-continent, different skin-colours, languages, dress styles and beliefs.
- **Journey**, the sole shared reason for anyone to stay at a *caravanserai*, in the middle of the wilderness, is because they are 'on the road' from somewhere to elsewhere. Filled with that sense of impermanence yet anticipation, anxiety mixed with hope. Foolsore yet headstrong, journeying with a purpose.
- **Story**, around the fire-flames in the courtyard, under the starlight of the sheltering night sky, the most astonishing stories must have been told. Legends from the homeland, tales of past journeys, dreams and myths, all mingled with personal hopes, fears and achievements. Stories that would make their own journey into the wider world in the hearts and minds of other wayfarers.

² The word *caravan* means 'a company of travellers' (whether merchants, pilgrims, soldiers or any other journeying group), while *sara* means 'an enclosed courtyard, a dwelling, and sometimes even a palace'

³ See John 14:2 where Jesus speaks of his 'father's house' having many 'dwellings' (alcoves to rest?). This suggestion that there may be a caravanserai type reference here is in the Gk word *monai*, which was often used in Greek for a temporary halt on a journey rather than a destination. In this context it anticipates the resurrection from the dead; the destination being the 'new Jerusalem' (symbol of the total new creation), of course celebrated and anticipated in the Peacemeal!

⁴ See Isaiah 21:13 where the people of the Arabian desert help out caravans with bread and water when they are stranded in the desert with no access to a *caravanserai* during time of war.



When thinking about the Peacemeal, with reference to the *caravanserai*, there seem to be some exciting points of connection. As we shall see, the Peacemeal is a place of:

- Welcome, relaxation and good food
- True friendships that make strong community
- People from every background
- Spiritual journeying and growth
- Life-changing stories

... and again, so very much more.

BROKEN AND SHARED

Hospitality⁵

Hospitality is expressing kindness to strangers and being welcoming and generous towards guests.

Hospitality is a sacrament; an encounter with mystery, opening ourselves up to the often surprising ways that God breaks into our lives. It is wonderfully expressed in Rublev's icon of 'The Trinity', based upon the story of Moses' three visitors (Gen 18:1-15 and see also Heb 13:2). There's a similar theme in the story of the Emmaus road, when the two disciples offer hospitality to the stranger who turns out to be the risen Christ (Lk 24:13-35).

We are originally 'the strangers', those "far off" (cf Epf 2:13) who are invited to and welcomed at God's table of grace. Now there is the expectation that we become part of this dynamic as participants:

Inscribed on the very heart of God's grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us.⁶

As we have seen the table is both centripetal and centrifugal. Jesus leads us out into a new openness to our neighbours, and even our enemies, and as we begin to trust him in this we find ourselves once again receiving; for in this way we encounter God afresh:

'Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them and we will come to them
and make our home with them'
(Jn 14:23)

'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me'
(Rev 3:20)

⁵ These reflections on 'Hospitality' are a slightly edited form of thoughts on the subject made by Daniel Rutland and made available 15th December 2008

⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* Abingdon Press 1996 p129



In these verses, and in the icon mentioned above, there is a blurring of the line between host and guest; giving and receiving become a continuous whole. It is, of course, a challenging path, because we come up against our fears and insecurities, and each step is an adventure of trust and vulnerability.

It is argued ⁷ that the global church begins with the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10, and it's interesting that this opens with hunger and food (Peter's vision), and also highlights Peter's sense of discomfort at embracing what is unfamiliar to him. Two people who would normally be seen as enemies are led by God to welcome each other into their homes, and begin a journey of discovery and reconciliation. This is central to the understanding of hospitality in its fullest sense.

It has been insightfully said that community must be "ever open to that which it doesn't know already".⁸ From a biblical perspective, I think there is a special mandate to keep drawing in those 'on the edge', the stranger, the outcast, the hungry or homeless:

We make room for Jesus in our lives, for the one for whom there was no room at the inn. But Jesus does not travel alone. He brings into the centre of our lives, and into our homes and to our supper table, the ragged and motley crew of outsiders.

How do we love each other? How do we live together? We share supper. Among the most telling questions of our lives and faith are: with whom do we eat? Where do we eat? What do we eat? How much do we eat?⁹

These challenging words are echoed in what Jesus said about who we should invite to our parties (Luke 14:12-14).

The distinctive of hospitality are the elements of bringing together, breaking down differences and getting behind assumptions and labels. When we eat together – rather than just providing food – 'we meet each other as fellow human beings, as 'companions' (literally, "those who share bread"). There is a sense of levelling and equality:

Hospitality is derived from the Latin word for "guest". It expresses a relationship between equal people: host and guest. It is bound by the rules of courtesy and human companionship, and ruled by the law of charity.

Hospitality reminds people that they are sisters and brothers, children of God, dependent on others and capable of being depended on by others. It is not a specialized work, requiring scientific training. It is something for everyone to practise according to the measure they are able to do so.¹⁰

This is particularly important in our culture, where care and provision for those in any kind of need tends to be seen as something best left to the professionals. It challenges us to think about what we can do ourselves, especially in community with others, and within that to be realistic about what is manageable and sustainable. We are not asked to be saviours or superheroes, only hospitable neighbours. There is much to consider around the whole

⁷ Alan and Eleanor Kreider and Paulus Widjaja *'A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church'* Good Books 2005 19-39

⁸ Naomi Millner at our first preparation meeting about 'Living Community' Thurs 19th June 2008

⁹ Ed Loring, *'I Hear Hope Banging at my Back Door'* The Open Door Community 2000 p 66

¹⁰ John Cogley, writing in the *Catholic Worker* October 1947; quoted by Loring (see above), p 63



question of boundaries, but the important thing is to have a go, to make a start, however small.

When we pray "Give us this day *our* daily bread", we are reminded that our need is also the need of others, with whom our lives are connected in both practical and symbolic ways. Here hospitality intersects with justice, and challenges our narrow definitions of kinship:

As we consider what it means to be "born again", as the evangelical jargon goes, we must ask ourselves what it means to be born again into a family in which our sisters and brothers are starving to death.¹¹

This is something that came home to me very powerfully when I went to stay for a month as the guest of a family of garment factory workers in a Cambodian slum, and experienced the extraordinary hospitality of the poor.

Hospitality is of necessity practical, but it has an interior dimension, as well; a hospitality of the heart, a new way of seeing. Prayer can be a form of hospitality in this sense, as we make room for the needs and concerns of others in the intimate place of our communion with God. (Henri Nouwen has much to say on this). I love the story of the Irish monk, St Kevin, in whose hands – stretched out in prayer – a blackbird is said to have nested. He couldn't bring himself to move until the young had fledged and flown. Our openness to God in prayer can lead us into unexpected relationships, which may be costly or uncomfortable. But in obedience there is also the potential for transformation, and for the ordinary stuff of life to take on new and deeper significance. I think that brings us back to the experience of mystery with which we began.

Peacemaking and Forgiveness

So food and drink is clearly a vital ingredient in peacemaking:

'If your enemy is hungry, give them bread to eat;
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink'
(Pr 25:21)

'If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, ...
No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink".'
(Rm 12:18-20)

This is dramatically illustrated in the story of Elisha and the Syrians:

'And when the Syrians came down against him, Eli'sha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray thee, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Eli'sha. And Eli'sha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Sama'ria. As soon as they entered Sama'ria, Eli'sha said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and lo, they were in the midst of Sama'ria. When

¹¹ Shane Claiborne, '*The Irresistible Revolution: living as an ordinary radical*' Zondervan 2006



the king of Israel saw them he said to Eli'sha, "My father, shall I slay them? Shall I slay them?" He answered, "You shall not slay them. Would you slay those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians came no more on raids into the land of Israel.' (2Kg 6:18-23)

Food and peacemaking is one of the most dramatic, powerful and practical ways to fulfil Jesus' command to:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."
(Lk 6:27) ¹²

▪ **Table of Forgiveness**

➤ Place of reconciliation:

- Atonement (at-one-ment);
- "This is my blood ... for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28);
- Hospitality embraces your enemy;
- 'If your enemy is hungry, feed them' (Rm 12:20);
- Making enemies friends ... you only eat with friends;
- Zacchaeus: 'guest of a sinner ... today salvation has come to this house (Lk 19:1-10);
- Jesus and Peter at dawn in Galilee (Jn 21:15-19);
- The kiss of peace (1Cor 16:20; 2Cor 13:12 et al);
- Pure and innocent - we become virgins all over again (cf 2Cor 11:2).

Environment and Creation

There is a direct link between breaking bread and ecology and the environment:

▪ **Table of Creation**

➤ Environmental eucharist:

- 'Table in the wilderness' (cf Ps 78:19);
- 'He gives the animals their food' (Ps 147:9);
- "Birds of the air do not sow ... your heavenly father feeds them" (Mt 6:26);
- "Who provides the raven its food?" (Job 38:41);
- Ravens fed Elijah (1Kg 17:6);
- "Proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15);
- 'The wolf and the lamb feed together' (Isa 65:25);
- 'The lion will eat straw like the ox' (Isa 11:7);
- A creation mass of the cosmic Christ (cf Col 1:15-20; Rm 8:19-23);
- Where the Spirit hovers over the new creation (cf Gen 1:2; Mt 3:16).

¹² Cf Mt 5:44; Lk 6:35



Multi-cultural and Multi-faith groups

Meals are significant to all faiths and cultures:

▪ Table of Diversity

- Every tongue, tribe and nation:
 - Place of diverse unity, the harmony of difference;
 - 'Come from east and west to eat at the table of the kingdom' (Mt 8:11);
 - 'Neither male nor female...' (Gal 3:28);
 - 'House of prayer for all nations' (Isa 36:7);
 - Paul and the Antioch meal (Gal 2:11-14).

Justice and the Poor

Shalom demands justice (Heb *mishpat*), which requires 'putting everything right'. Hunger is an all too frequent consequence of injustice. Feeding the oppressed is often the first step towards sweeping away injustice; they need to gain their strength to join you in the task:

"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house .. ?
(Is 58:6-7)

(God) who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
(Ps 146:7)

The '*shalom* activist' is someone whose whole appetite is for justice:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they shall be satisfied."
(Mt 5:6)

Providing food for justice is both their passion and responsibility.

Shalom demands well-being, which includes physical health and strength that only a good diet can provide:

'wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.'
(Ps 104:15)

The desperate plight of the poor is the reverse:

'... the poor of the earth all hide themselves ... seeking prey in the wilderness as food for their children. They gather their fodder in the field and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man. They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter ...



They go about naked, without clothing; hungry, they carry the sheaves; among the olive rows of the wicked they make oil; they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst.’
(Job 24:4-11)

Jesus is very clear about the *shalom* response that is required:

“ ... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink” ...
“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren,
you did it to me.”
(Mt 25:35, 40)

Providing food for the well-being of others is a clear ‘*shalom* activist responsibility.

▪ **Table of Compassion**

- Feed the hungry:
 - Food is for sharing: a re-equalizing the community;
 - “I was hungry and you gave me food” (Mt 25:35);
 - “Hunger and thirst after righteousness / justice” (Mt 5:6);
 - Meeting the needs of the poor and strangers;
 - ‘Hospitality without grumbling’ (1Pt 4:9);
 - Entertaining angels unawares (Heb 13:2);
 - ‘The fast that I choose’ (Isa 58:6);
 - ‘Many are weak, ill and some have died’ (1Cor 11:26).

Revolution and Liberation

The early Christians were described as those who ‘turned the world upside down!’

▪ **Table of Revolution**

- Supper of subversion:
 - An act of insurrection;
 - Place of conspiracy - ‘breathing together’ with God;
 - Declaration of the overthrow of the existing order;
 - Overturned the tables of the moneychangers (Jn 2:15);
 - Consequence of proclaiming the kingdom / resurrection;
 - ‘Drinking anew in the kingdom of the father’ (Mt 26:29).

▪ **Table of Liberation**

- Feast of freedom:
 - Passover meal / Exodus experience;
 - Seder declaration, “We are not slaves any more!”
 - Proclaim release the captives (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18);
 - Proclaiming Jubilee;
 - ‘For freedom Christ has set us free’ (Gal 5:1);
 - Not just freedom from, but freedom to... ;
 - Declaration of freedom and liberty.



Debate and Scepticism

Notice how much of Jesus' teaching and example took place at the meal table :

▪ **Table of Discovery**

- Stimulus of understanding
 - Memory is key to learning and discovery
 - Discipleship is learning
 - Peacemeal is a 'school table'
 - Wisdom's meal (Prov 9:1-6)
 - We take truth and make a meal out of it
 - A place of learning, teaching, debate and challenge

▪ **Table of Decision**

- Repentance and reorientation:
 - 'Metanoia' - change of mind bringing change of direction and lifestyle;
 - 'Learning to say "Daddy" all over again' (J. Jeremias);
 - Embracing discipleship, responding to Jesus' call, "Follow me";
 - Radical choices being made.

Questions and Reflections

1. Can the Eucharist properly be described as a 'missionary meal'? Give clear reasons for your answer.
2. What are the implications of breaking bread for the Christian attitude to hospitality?
3. In what way can we describe breaking bread as centrifugal?

Reading and Resources

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R Banks *'Paul's Idea of Community'* Hendrickson 1994
GR Beasley-Murray *'Baptism in the New Testament'* Eerdmans 1973
A Dulles *'Models of the Church'* Doubleday 1978
RN Flew *'Jesus and his Church'* Abingdon 1938
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G Lohfink *'Jesus And Community'* Paulist Press 1984
J Moltmann *'The Church in the Power of the Spirit'* SCM 1977
C Raphael *'A Feast of History'* Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1982
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