

## Rohana's Reflections

# Where Do We Look For the Bread of Life?

July 29 2012

*I look for the Presence that helps me to cope, like an anchor in a storm, like bread that fills my deepest needs. ~ Rohana*

### Scripture Readings

*Whether you take what is written in the Bible as fact, metaphor or story, listen to these words now, for the meaning they hold for you this day*

#### **2 Kings 4:42-44**

*The prophet Elisha uses a little food to feed many hungry people.*

#### **Ephesians 3:14-21**

*The writer to the Ephesians prays that these new Christians might "have the power to comprehend...the breadth and length and height and depth" of the love of Christ.*

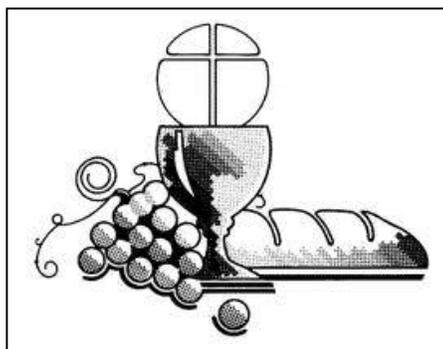
#### **John 6:1-14**

*A large crowd follows Jesus, attracted by his powerful signs. Their interruption of retreat with need occasions a miraculous sign of Jesus' power and mission.*

**M**ost of you remember how, as a result of a congregational survey, we learned that many of our members were uncomfortable with the Christian sacrament of communion. Our church board chose to return to having communion only 4 times a year, instead of once a month, partly because some members were staying away on communion Sundays! In two years I have only heard one complaint about this change so I am assuming people don't even miss it. (Is this true?)

We had a couple of talking circles to hear people's concerns. Then, I preached about communion a few times, and we planned to host a workshop on the subject. We became so involved however, in our process of becoming a shared ministry with St. Martin's Anglican Church, (along with finding a full-time minister to serve both congregations), that we didn't go any further in our exploration of the meaning of communion.

Now I have an opportunity to revisit the subject for the next 4 Sundays, as our texts from the gospel of John are about Jesus as the Bread of Life. Since it is important for us to not only *study* Christian communion, (also called Eucharist which means giving thanks), but also to *experience* communion. It is important that we not just talk about it but do it. On August 19<sup>th</sup> we will sit together in the lounge at a long table, similar to that of the disciples with Jesus on their last night together, and share a small meal along with bread and wine in a simple style of communion.



My intention is to address some of your concerns and hopefully our new minister can continue in more depth with a workshop perhaps this fall.

We learned that most of you are comfortable understanding communion as a memorial meal, a time when we break bread in community in remembrance of Jesus. We believe, and many have experienced, that Jesus is present with us in that small memorial meal.

What some of us find difficult is the sacrificial language around broken bread as Jesus broken body and the wine as Jesus' blood spilled for the forgiveness of our sins. As most of you know, Catholics and Protestants, and various Christian groups have a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices.

I am sympathetic with those who no longer believe in a God who has to be appeased by a blood sacrifice of a perfect human (which is one way communion has been interpreted). Like most Protestants, I don't accept the Catholic belief called 'transubstantiation' that the bread and wine are turned into Jesus' body, like some kind of magic act. Some members have even referred to communion as being too close to cannibalism for comfort!

There, I have named some of the issues! The beginning of resolving issues is to name them. They are quite complex, but let us begin by exploring today's texts through the question, "where do we look for the bread of life?"

I begin by reminding us that in the United and Anglican traditions we do not believe in transubstantiation, nor do we believe in the inerrancy of scripture. In other words, we often understand both symbolically rather

than literally, and we leave room for errors made and agendas served by the author's writings. So I begin this brief study of John's texts about communion with a few words about the gospel of John.

Most scholars agree that it was written after the other gospels and where it differed from the others it has been assumed that the author changed the traditions to suit his theological agenda. He used a lot of symbolism such as Jesus being "the bread of life"; notice his choice of words is very close to the words and actions of communion, In verse 11: "Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated". The author of John was also reliant on texts from the Old Testament.

That is why we heard the text this morning from 2 Kings, about a man bringing 20 loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain to the prophet Elisha, telling him to feed 100 people. This text most likely influenced John's writing of the story we heard today from John ch.6.

If Elisha fed 100 people, Jesus fed 5000. In both stories it was God acting through them. The text reads 'they shall eat and have some left. He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord' (vs.44). The story is similar in John's account of Jesus feeding of the 5000.

What is to me at the heart of both these stories is that God was made present through Elisha and Jesus and that people were *fed*. I don't know if such miracles actually happen, I have never experienced such a miracle, but I am open to the possibility of it happening. However, what I think is being said is that Elisha and Jesus in their missions were able to feed people's spiritual needs.

The stories are parables. A parable is a succinct story which illustrates one or more instructive principles, a type of analogy. The prodigal son for example illustrates God's unconditional love. The principle in today's stories was that Elisha and Jesus were able to connect people to God through the tangible elements of bread and fish, symbols used in many places in the bible. Since they gave generously, there was more than enough. This is the principle behind tithing and giving: when we give we receive.

At the heart of the texts is God's Presence and actions. Later in John, Jesus said to the people "very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you". We do well to ask: do we work for the food that endures for eternal life?

My belief and experience, is that God is present with us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit when we break bread together as members of the body of Christ. It is in the taking, breaking and sharing that we feel the Presence. There is always more than enough. We take it with us into our daily lives, helping us to live our lives and preparing us for the life to come.

You have your stories. I hope we can share them. Here is one from Rev. Rolf Svane told to him by a widow who was a member of a church in which he was the minister. In communion she experienced the presence of her husband who had died. In the end of the prayer where the church on earth is joined with the hosts of heaven in praising God with an unending hymn: "Holy, holy, holy Lord" She knew that her beloved husband was with her and that somehow the meal joined them together with the "things in heaven and

things on earth". Communion opened up a window into eternity for her, a connection to the "cloud of witnesses".

Volumes have been written about the meaning of communion and the meaning of scriptures, and it does help us to understand the background to our faith. However, what really matters is how it helps us to live our lives. Do we follow Jesus with expectations? Are we looking to be fed?

Do we seek healing from illness or trauma? Do we need help with unresolved financial or challenging relationship problems? Do we seek a miracle for a loved one who is living in the grip of an addiction? Where do we look for the bread of life?

Where I look is for the Presence that helps me to cope, like an anchor in a storm, like bread that fills my deepest needs. Christ's presence, when I am living by faith, is manifested in a harmonious inner and outer life. When I am tested or challenged by adverse circumstances I turn to that inner anchor for support, knowing that a caring, compassionate God is present in love. I am loved and cared for unconditionally. Thanks be to God.

I end this morning with the prayer of the author of today's text from Ephesians: I pray that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." *Amen!*