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Bread Enough For A People

I like to think I speak with some level of authority on the topic of comfort food. When I was in elementary school, on your birthday you were invited to bring a favorite treat to share with the class. Most kids brought cupcakes or rice krispy treats. Not me. I wanted to bring mashed potatoes. My mom used the small kitchen to whip up my favorite food and apparently my favorite dessert too.

When I boil potatoes or even bake them using the microwave the aromas transport me back to my grandma's house. A place of safety. A kind of sanctuary.

CBS Sunday Morning recently ran a spot titled *Why We Love Comfort Foods*. Do we really need to ask? Not surprisingly, the answer was- they make us feel good and they are filled with nostalgia.

Those memories are mixed with warmth and melancholy. They are like a tender embrace, a visitor from days gone by. They also can be tinged with the sting of what once was. Meals contain multitudes. Tables- talk. They reveal so much about us. Their ingredients are like a gastronomical genome that decodes who we belong to and the families that have made us who we are.

In Deuteronomy we find a creed for the people of Israel. It gives shape not only to the festival of the first fruits, but their core ancestral identity.

Through Jacob, their shared experience as wandering people without a home and their experience living as aliens in a strange land. The suffering they endured at the hands of their oppressors-- and the God who always hears the cry, never abandons them, and comes to set them free.

Having had their fill of the loaves and fish the disciples find Jesus on the other side of the sea and stumble into a conversation about hunger. Something we know too well. We have our own hunger. Those things we crave. A world where all have what they need. A community where everyone has shelter. Where no one has to live in fear. To know that someone sees our anguish. We long for the day when sin and death will finally be done away with. Our hearts ache for a million different things. We are so often far from home.

Jesus speaks of working for food that endures for eternal life. Food that will sate your hunger and quench your thirst. Bread that will never run out or go stale. Food with no expiration date. He begins to explain that this is his own flesh. His body is the gift that is given away. Jesus is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. He lays down his life and empties himself for you. Broken open so you can find rest in his outstretched arms. This is God's sign. The cross. This sign proclaims that nothing can separate us from God's love.

We are so bound to this God that this sign is now traced on our brow. Jesus said, "For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." In baptism God has set God's seal on your own broken and beautiful flesh. You are God's beloved child. Find your place in the cross.

I don't know what this day holds for you or who will or won't be around your table. Before we venture there we will meet around this table. Homebase. Whether we can muster a "thank you" or not is beside the point because we will get fed again by the God who always comes down to us. God who insists on making space for all that you carry. Hunger and all. The one whose body is placed in your hands without reservation or hesitation.

What food tells the story of your people?

Cookbook author Padma Lakshmi talks about how food shapes the narratives of immigrants. Their palettes become a roux that includes ingredients old and new, past and present- so their plate is a testimony to where they have been and where they are going at the same time. Mashed potatoes, with fried lentils and turmeric. Turkey with spicy chutney gravy.

In a little wafer and a sip of wine is the story of our people. Sinners saved by grace. Here everyone receives the same portion: All of God's promises. Without distinction. Seat secured by God's work. No earning your place, no tiered seating, or calling ahead. No boasting, just curiosity about neighbors we rub elbows with and who give us a taste of the reign of God. Adding their ingredients to our familiar recipe. Bringing a depth of flavor that comes from a God who insists on being joined to material. Earth. Flesh. Your body and mine. At this table that stretches out into the world to come you belong to God and to one another. Comfort isn't even the start of it.

What spice or flavor do you contribute to the body of Christ? Without it our one bread is incomplete. As one gospel song says, "We need you, you need me, we are all a part of God's body."

I have had the joy of serving communion to curious kids who reach out their hands and then are surprised that they are given something. That Jesus is for them too. What am I supposed to do with it, they wonder? Just eat it.

