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Our Bread for the Morrow

Thanksgiving Service

Mark Belletini

Opening Words

We are here

*to remember that no one owes us anything,
and that all living things, the great universe itself,
and every crumb of bread are gifts, a given,
which we can only receive and share,
not grab, own or keep. This is worship.*

And so we begin our Thanksgiving feast:

**Living our lives with purpose and gratitude, moved by the beauty of
the world and claiming justice for all who live upon it, we open our
hearts to greater loving, healthier knowledge, deeper compassion
and hope of peace.**

Sequence

The earth.

One planet.

Round, global,

so that when you trace its shape
with your finger,

you end up where you started. It's one. It's whole.

All the dotted lines we draw on our maps
of this globe are just that, dotted lines.

They smear easily.

All oceans can be crossed.

All mountain ranges can be crossed.

Even the desert can be crossed.

The grain that grows on one side of the border
tastes just as good as the grain on the other side.

Moreover, bread made from rice is just as nourishing

to body/spirit as bread made from corn,
or spelt or teff or wheat or barley.
There is no superior land, no chosen site,
no divine destiny falling on any one nation
who draws us dotted lines just and so.
There is only one earth we all share,
we, the living, with all else that lives
and does not live. Virus, granite, wave,
city, cornfield, prophet, beggar, child,
slum, tower, mine, robin, eel, grandfather,
rose, olive branch, bayonet, and this poem
and moment are all within the circle,
undivided by dotted lines or final certainties.
Everything, but everything, for good or ill, is
part of the shared whole...
sky, earth, song, words and now, this silence...

silence

Every memory and every hope is part of that
circle too, every sorrow, every joy in the
human heart. Pausing in reverence in the midst
of this circle, we name the women, men and children in our lives who
are part of this circle of joy and sorrow, children, women and men for
whom, on
this particular day, we are thankful.

naming

In the midst of the circle of the earth, we watch
the wheat grow, the rain fall, the cities hum.
We gather the spirit, and kindle a flame of hope
by daring to present music as our offering
of praise, our testimony of thanksgiving.

Readings

The First Reading comes from the same folktale source found in the Hebrew scriptures that I read a few weeks ago. The Elisha tales often have morals, sort of like Aesop's Fables in Greece.

A man came from Baal-shalishah and he brought the prophet Elisha some bread of the first harvest— twenty loaves of barley bread, along with some fresh grain in a sack. And Elisha said, “Give it to the people gathered here and let them eat.” He replied, “How can I set a mere twenty loaves before such a crowd? There’s over a hundred here!” But the prophet said, “Just give the loaves to the people and let them eat. For so says the Eternal: They shall eat, and have some left over.” So he set the loaves before them; and when they had eaten, they did indeed find that they had some left over, as the Eternal had said.

The Second Reading is a poem by the mid-twentieth century Polish poet Anna Swirszczynska

The Same Inside

Walking to your place for a love feast
I saw at a street corner an old beggar woman.

I took her hand, kissed her delicate cheek,
we talked, she was the same inside as I am,
from the same kind, I sensed this instantly
as a dog knows by scent another dog.

I gave her money, I could not part from her.
After all, one needs someone who is close.

And then I no longer knew
why I was walking to your place.

Sermonpoem

Not a long sermon.
Not even a sermon, perhaps.
Just a few lines, simple ideas.
Hardly a poem, either.
Yet it's all I have to say
on this Sunday before Thanksgiving.
In the folktale from the Bible,
an insufficient amount of loaves
feeds a whole lot of people sufficiently
and more than sufficiently.
The story does not say,
"Oh, a miracle."
The story does not say,
"God made the barley loaves swell
and grow to the size of horses, just like that."
The story simply says, "The bread
was placed before them. And they ate.
And there was some left over."
Why?
I'd like to think it's because they
ate *together*.
They had to share a limited amount of bread,
so they divided it evenly.

No one ate more than their share.
No man grabbed five loaves all to himself,
and let the other 99 split the fifteen.
No woman shoved others away.
They all broke the bread and shared.
They all recognized that not one of them
had a right by birth, or even giftedness,
to more food than any one else.
So that social understanding, that deep sense

within them that it was time for them to stop panicking about what they
did not have,
and give thanks for what they could share,
must be part of the meaning of the story.
But, did they just share the bread,
I wonder, without reaching out to each other?
Did they eat in perfect and awful silence,
tense and withdrawn, their backs turned?
I doubt it. I bet they faced each other;
I bet they spoke with each other.
I bet they shared other stories of other meals,
and other times they gave thanks and broke bread.
I bet they stopped worrying about what they did not have yet...fame,
prestige, honor, the perfect job,
the perfect relationship, the safety net, the sure answer, the final
meaning. I bet what really nourished their hunger on that day was not a
few barley loaves, but tomorrow's bread,
bread not *yet* kneaded, punched and baked.
I bet they feasted on their hopes for a world where hunger was no more,
and anyone could come to the table without anyone else making a face,
turning away. Tomorrow, everyone can come.
And there will be enough. We know it now.
And the bread became more than bread maybe...
it became the foretaste of beloved community.
The breaking and sharing of bread was one thing, but as they looked into
each other's eyes, they knew in their heart that breaking each other was
quite something else, and was no good. It reminded them that the really
good things in life have to do with honor and respect and gratitude and a
turning away from the desire to punish and hurt and break others for not
being just like them.
A satisfying meal that.
With plenty left over too.
Fragments of still-growing compassion,
crumbs of yet-to-be uncovered truth,
all very satisfying.
And our more modern poet,

isn't she telling the same story,
with just a different plot?

On her way to a love feast, she is (nice phrase that!)... a fabulous meal with lots of warmth and tenderness and welcome, and on the way she meets a beggar, a woman who has nothing, and she recognizes her immediately as her sister, equal in dignity to all the wonderful people with whom she is about to feast in love. And she suddenly forgets the way to her supper, because with eyes wide open she sees that the feast is, and always has been, all around her, all the time. It's in the communion of human heart with human heart, open and not defiant, careful but not armored. Class doesn't mean much then, nor color nor history; nor even the expensive Macy's floral scent rising from the woman on her way to the love feast clashing with the sour sweat rising from the beggar.

The true feast, she realizes, is not at some particular address, but is really tasted when tomorrow's bread...the bread of justice and mutual respect, is tasted today. You don't arrive at the love feast, she realizes, as a destination. It's either a love feast all along the way, or there is no love feast at all.

"Give us today our bread for the morrow," said the Galilean prophet, Yeshu bar Maryam, Jesus, the son of Mary. Not daily bread, our best teachers remind us, not just our merest need; but rather, tomorrow's bread, our *great* need for justice and communion between all who share this great green earth.

Blest are you, Love, our way, and our goal. You are with us from this very moment all the way to the holiday on Thursday, and every day past that till the end of our days. Thanks.

Offering

This congregation supports many great projects in the world that help us and others share tomorrow's bread today. But we also pledge of our livelihoods together to keep the heat in, the coolness out, the floors

cleaned, the staff in their planning rooms, the ministers by hospital bed, schoolroom and pulpit, and the children wrapped tenderly in a great and living tradition that values their own religious life and invites them to be exactly who they are, and no one else, religiously. To this end, we offer a time for pledges to be paid during the celebration time on Sunday, for those who wish.

Great Thanksgiving Prayer for the Breaking of Bread

Wendy: We are here to give thanks and break bread together. We share bread made of many grains the earth has brought forth, each different from the other, no two exactly the same. Like the people of the earth, these grains rise from many kinds of earth. Together today, we break the bread of the world; we share the bread of life in peace.

Mark: Only bread is for breaking. The dignity and worth of each human life is not for breaking.

Young voice: east

**Bread of the world given to us,
nourish us with strength and wholeness.**

(break bread)

Mark: Only bread is for the breaking. the bonds of love and community are not for breaking.

Young voice: south

Bread of the world given to us, sign for us the kind of love that leads to peace.

(break bread)

Mark:

Only bread is for the breaking. our faith
in the truth of justice and power of compassion

is not for breaking.

Young voice: west

**Bread of the world given to us, bid us share
you equally as a clear sign of that faithfulness.
(break bread)**

Mark:

Only bread is for the breaking. the earth that is
our common home is not for breaking.

Young voice: north

**Bread of the world given to us, be the foretaste
of a healing feast for all of our earth.**

Mark:

Only bread is for the breaking. Our right to seek the truth in freedom
without harming anyone is not for breaking.

Young voice: center

**Bread of the world given to us, be the promise of
wisdom, the hope that greets the morrow with welcome.**

Rachel :

Only bread is for the breaking. Our spirits are not for breaking, not now,
not ever. May this ceremony of the breaking of bread, rooted in our
ancient Middle Eastern heritage, bring a balm to the ache
in our hearts, a brightness to minds searching for light, and a vision of
the kind of peace in this world, greater than any we had ever imagined,
where all people of the earth can come to a feast that leaves no one
hungry in body or spirit, for they are one.

People: We're Gonna Sit At the Welcome Table

