

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

Pastor Alva Looze

Ephesians give us a set of rules for harmonious community living. There is nothing surprising here. It tells us to live honestly, treat others with kindness, share with the needy, and resolve conflicts with fairness are the sorts of things one might reasonably expect would make any community work better. They are also exactly the sorts of things that seem difficult to maintain in any community over the long haul, regardless of their sensibleness.

The important thing is that these are described as appropriate responses to the gospel. Behaving this way will not make God love us. Behaving this way will not make us a Christian community. God loves us first, and calls us together into community. It is only because we know ourselves to be loved and loveable, that we can begin to think about how to behave in return. The recipients of this letter have been Christians for some time. The letter has been expanding on things they knew already, rather than attempting to convert them from something else. Yet it is still appropriate to remind Christians of these rules or expectations. Even the most fervent among us will not always live out in our lives the compassion we feel in our hearts, and the reminder to live with this kind of discipline is helpful.

Knowing God involves living in certain ways, as the Ephesians passage reminds us, yet it is more than just following a set of rules. It really is more about being in relationship. How do we know God?

To survive on our journey, to have the strength to go through the barren places of life, those places where we are alone, because of divorce, or illness, or death we need to eat the food and drink the drink that God has prepared for us: the food that he grants each one of us in the sacred stories of this Holy book and in the stories told by people of faith who come into our lives from time to time.

We need to cry out to God when we are in need, when we are in despair, and then heed the tap that comes upon our shoulder in the middle of the night, the voice that whispers in our ear or the thoughts that we feel close to our hearts that tell us to believe, to trust, to rise up and take the bread and the water that will be there for us and to eat and drink and eat and drink again and to go forth to complete our journey.

Sometimes we feel ourselves running on empty and sometimes we feel that we don't have the strength to go on. Perhaps it is time to get nourishment from the food around us. From the people sitting beside us, people who have faith and know where God is to be found.

God is here – in the bread that has been passed around this sanctuary, in the light that enters through these beautiful windows, in the just ordinary things. The daily miracles that we take for granted, the rising and setting of the sun, and the moon and the stars and the every changing mountains and the rhythm of the seasons. The ordinary is so powerful, it is magical, and glorious, and wondrous for those who have the eyes to see. Those who seek God and are willing to get up and eat and drink what he has provided.

God is here who sent his son Jesus to save us, the son of Joseph, whose parents indeed we do know; the carpenter with whom we are so familiar. The carpenter's son who grew up in Nazareth. How could this tradesman from a poor home be a special messenger from God? God has many messengers. His greatest message came through a Galilean carpenter and for that very reason the Jews disregarded it. God who tells us "I am the bread of life" and who told his disciples "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

God is in control. This is the part of what makes the bread of Christ different from the manna in the wilderness. Moses' manna sustained people to the brink of the Promised Land. Jesus' nourishment never leaves those who partake of it, through death and

beyond. The new elements of this second section are the insistence that to know Jesus is to know God, and that to know Jesus is to have eternal life.

God is the one who weeps with us in the depths of our anguish. God is the one for whom we wait in the midst of the blackness, and whom we know will come just as surely as the morning comes. God is the one who loves us, and risks everything for us, and asks only in return that we should live with the same kind of intelligent compassion. God is the one who comes to us in Jesus to bring nourishment for the day and the promise of eternal life. We know God through the experience of those who have known God before us, and through our own experience of love and nourishment day by day by day.

God has provided us with food for our journey, we need to take and eat that we may be strong in him and so reach the place he is calling us.

A poem by Janet Cawley

God of the way, you are the road we travel,
and the sign we follow;
You are bread for the journey,
And the wind of arrival.

Guide us as we follow in your way,
Holding on to each other,
Reaching out to your beloved world.

And when we stray,
Seek us out and find us,
Set our feet on the path again
And lead us safely home.
In the name of Jesus, our Companion we pray. Amen

This personal journey that we are on can be exciting, powerful, adventurous, and sometimes frightening but with God in control we know we need not fear the oven of life so that we are able to bake through and through. Can't you just savor the aroma of freshly baked bread, Thank you God the giver of the bread of life?