

When the Ordinary is Sacred

By: Meagan McLaughlin

July 26, 2020. In the most ordinary of tasks, God shows up. In the most ordinary of things God is present, and the ordinary is sacred. The weekly practice of baking bread at home, for online worship on Sunday, connects us with generations of people in all times and all parts of the earth. And today, with our friends Jack and Ruthie and Maggie and Megan, we celebrate the sacrament of Communion.

Readings: [1 Kings 3:5-12](#), [Romans 8:26-39](#), [Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52](#)

*** Transcript ***

I don't know how many of you have made bread, but there is something unique about bread dough for those who have made it, isn't there? I hadn't done a lot of bread baking prior to COVID-19, but suddenly I've found myself making bread on a weekly basis, for the celebration of Communion. I use a really simple recipe — only four ingredients plus water. And there is no yeast in it. I put the flour, baking powder, salt, and oil in the bowl and add some water, and begin to turn it over and over with the spoon. If there's still any flour left in the bowl then I add a little bit more water and turn it some more. And maybe a bit more — but not too much. Once all the flour is all mixed in, when there's just the right amount of water, there is that moment when the bread dough becomes super stretchy and almost stringy, flaky-looking in a damp sort of way I think. That's when I wash my hands (again) and mush the dough between them, digging my fingers in to be sure that any dry bits are well-mixed. And then I let it sit for about half an hour before I fry it in a pan. My favorite part is when the dough is just done enough to hold its shape really well, and I use the spatula to make the cross on the bread before I flip it over to cook the other side.

Most weeks I make my bread on Fridays, and it sits wrapped in paper towel on the counter waiting for Sunday morning. I'm kind of shocked that none of my cats has discovered this routine yet, but maybe they just don't like bread. Making the bread has become one of my favorite parts of the week, the mixing and the kneading and the frying and the crossing, and this ritual has brought new meaning to the sacrament for me, in its ordinary-ness.

This weekly practice of taking such simple ingredients, come right out of God's earth, to make the bread that feeds my body, connects me with generations of people in all times and all parts of the earth, who have done the same to feed their families. Generations of Christians who have made flour and water into loaves and wafers, poured the wine, and set the table for their Sunday Eucharist celebrations, for two thousand years now. Each Sunday as we celebrate Communion, I have felt nourished in body as well as spirit. It has surprisingly become one of my favorite meals of the week.

And this week, I got to make bread with friends! Wednesday evening, Jack and Ruthie and Maggie and Megan, and their families and I, got together on Zoom, and we had the privilege of sharing this ritual together (thanks parents!) while we continued to learn and talk about what the sacrament of Communion means and the grace of finding God in the making, and the breaking, of the bread.

The kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a huge tree for the birds to nest in. The kingdom of God is like a bit of yeast — when it's mixed in with a whole bag of flour, it makes the whole loaf rise. The kingdom of God is like finding treasure while you are plowing your field. The kingdom of God is like sorting fish with nets. Not stories of grand miracles or royal parades, but ordinary folks doing ordinary things, and discovering that God is right there in the ordinary-ness.

In *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experience of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.”

In the most ordinary of tasks, God shows up. In the most ordinary of things, God is present, and the ordinary is sacred. In the catechism, Luther explains that baptism reveals God’s grace not because of the ordinary water alone, but because in the water *and* the word and the promise of our God, God extends forgiveness of sins, rescues us from evil, and brings us new life. The sacrament of Communion reveals God’s grace, not because of the bread and the wine, but because in the bread and the wine *and* in the word and the promise of our God, God extends forgiveness, and salvation, and life.

We as Lutheran Christians celebrate these sacraments, and in these moments of grace, we experience God making the ordinary sacred. Nourished and fed and forgiven and blessed in these sacraments, we can see God’s presence in all ordinary things. Deer in the yard. Tending your garden. Washing your dishes. Conversation about the Sunday scriptures with a friend. A headbutt from your kitty, or an affectionate lick from your puppy.

And Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, God’s promise to be faithful has no limits. Even when everything is working against you, even when death surrounds you, even when it seems that there is no way out, when we are so confused and wounded and exhausted that we can’t string two words together, God is present. Because nothing, Paul says, nothing can separate us from God’s love.

And so today, we come together to worship, we hear the promises of God in the scriptures, and with our friends Jack and Ruthie and Maggie and Megan, we celebrate the sacrament of Communion. And in the ordinary bread — or the crackers, or the waffle, or the cookies — *with* the word and the promise of our God, the grace of God is present with us.

In our first reading today, we hear that Solomon could have chosen wealth or power as his gifts from God. But he didn’t. Instead, he chose to ask for God’s Spirit of Wisdom to change him, so that he might know God’s will, and be able to bring justice for God’s people. And as we are fed and nourished by the bread and the wine today, we see God in the ordinary. We too are empowered to embody the love and the mercy of our God. We too, like Solomon, are granted wisdom to know God’s will and be a voice for justice for all of God’s people.

Jack, Ruthie, Maggie, and Megan, in your baptisms we celebrated the love and wisdom and justice and joy that you each bring into this world, and claimed the promise of God that you are God’s beloved child forever. Today, we celebrate with you the sacrament of Communion, and we are all strengthened and blessed by your presence in our family of faith. We pray that you will always know how much God loves you, that you will know you are forgiven when you make mistakes, and that you will see the presence of God in the ordinary things all around you.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

2020, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, video, YouTube, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, 1 Kings 3:5-12, Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33, Matthew 13:44-52, coronavirus, An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith, Barbara Brown Taylor, Jack Wood, Ruthie Helton, Maggie Ringkor, Megan Eftink, First Communion