

St Peter's, Mount Park, Ealing
Good Friday Reflections
Reflection 1

Bread: Broken for you.

Bread; a basic food stuff. Basic to most cultures and civilisations. An image involving bread that has been with me all this week.

The image is two hands holding a small loaf of bread. The hands are worn and character-filled. Rough, stained with work. And yet as they hold the bread they are gentle, almost caressing the bread. There's no rush, no pressure. No sense of force. Just peace. As the hands hold the bread they gently break it. Slowly and softly tearing the bread apart. As the bread breaks crumbs fall like wood shavings in a carpenter's workshop. The bread looks fresh and warm and inviting.

This image of breaking bread comes to us in the scriptures a number of times. In the gospels we have the feeding of crowds of people or an intimate meal with the teacher. In the Old Testament bread is shared as an act of trust or understanding, covenant or love. There are parables and teachings about the life of faith being like unleavened bread. Bread is involved in miracles such as Elijah's feeding of the widow of Zarephath. Ultimately for Christians the breaking of bread draws us into the last supper in the upper room and Jesus breaking and sharing bread with his disciples.

Bread is the basic food of life. A simple food that has been part of most cultures staple diet for time in memorial.

I have always been rubbish at making bread. I think I lack patience. But I like fresh bread. So I bought that good old middle class kitchen appliance, a bread machine. I still don't tire of waking up in the morning to the smell of fresh bread. There is something in us that draws us to this simple smell of home and safety. It lifts the heart and sweetens the whole house.

At least bread should be simple. In his book 'Dough' Richard Bertinet extols the virtues of making your own bread. He begins with a simple fact. Shop bought bread has up to 17 ingredients, including a mould suppressor.

Homemade bread has five ingredients: years, flour, salt, water and oil. It is and should be the simplest basic food stuff.

Jesus broke bread for his disciples. He shared a meal, the Passover meal in which they remembered the salvation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Yet in this bread which he broke he shared a new salvation. Simple, gentle uncomplicated. The salvation of the world. Now not bought with lamb and bitter herbs or with bread but with flesh. The bread, broken for us all offers love. Uncomplicated. Unconditional, no excessive ingredients. Just love.

That moment passed. Now we have no bread, just wood. The wood of same. There is nothing else.

There is nothing complicated here. A simple act with simple elements to share a simple meal with simple meaning. There's nothing exceptional in the bread and in it's breaking. Neither now in the wood and its killing.

We are left bare and simple ourselves at the foot of the cross. There is nothing else. No crowds. No pomp. Just us and Jesus; the broken bread of life hanging on the tree of shame.

St Peter's, Mount Park, Ealing
Good Friday Reflections
Reflection 2

Blood: poured out for you.

Blood: the visceral element. Can't get more basic than that. Blood makes us squirm, makes some of us feel ill even makes some of us pass out. Blood, a symbol of horror and all things bad, even evil. Blood, a statement of death and destruction.

We have made life so clinical with death being hidden away. When our loved ones die we allow strangers to cart their bodies off to backroom preparation tables. Often we never see them again until presented to us in a box. Our ancestors would have been horrified. They would have kept the body at home, washed it with reverence and love, laid the body out for visitors to pay their respects before being brought to church, presented to God as one of his own to be buried with dignity in the community plot.

Spring lambs bouncing in fields. Calves nestling into their mother's udder. Young bulls playing fisticuffs with their equals. Pigs snuffling in troughs. Hens gaily squawking in free range luxury. We forget the bolt to the head or the electric current through the body, the cut throat or rung neck. Our ancestors would have intimate knowledge of this slaughter. Geese kept in coal sheds, pigs at the bottom of the garden, chickens in the yard. Killing their own meat. Using the blood to make pudding and gravy. Dispatching what they needed; salting, drying, preserving. Blood here brings life, carried life, meant life.

In the Book of Leviticus Moses is instructed by God on how Aaron should carry out the ritual of atonement. Aaron dresses in linen. Two goats are brought to the Tent of Meeting. By lottery one is chosen for God and one for the people. The goat for God is offered as a sin offering. Aaron offers a bull as a sin offering for himself. A ram is offered as a burnt offering. Slaughter here is a sign of life and blessing. The blood of the bull is sprinkled on the mercy seat in the Tent of Meeting for Aaron and his family. The blood of the slaughtered goat, the sin offering is sprinkled on the mercy seat in the Tent of Meeting for the people of Israel. The scape goat has the sins of the people placed upon it by laying on of Aaron's hands and is lead out into the wilderness where it is

driven away – to exile and death. The blood is life; life for the people. Blood is healing and forgiveness for the people, who will sin again.

It is difficult for us at the foot of the cross; it is so alien to everything we know. We don't see death. We don't see blood. Here we see both. And our minds reel. Our modern, clinical world doesn't do blood, doesn't do death, untimely death at least.

When we look all we see is death and destruction. The blood running down the wood. The flesh torn by nails and briar. Torn flesh is death, but blood life.

The cup passes amongst the followers. They have eaten the flesh, the bread offered by Jesus. Now his blood, his wine, his life; their healing. The cup passes from them now as we stand at the foot of the cross. This blood, the offering, this sacrifice is now made once and for all. This is life, we just can't see it; yet.

St Peter's, Mount Park, Ealing.
Good Friday Reflections
Reflection 3

Marginalised.

Standing at the foot of the cross we are alone. There may be crowds passing by. Even so we are alone. We may be surrounded by friends and family. Even so we are alone. We are on our own. On the edge. No one understands.

It is bereavement. Some important to us is no longer here. This is pretty dramatic. Cut away everything we have seen or heard. Cut away the back story and the klaxon of words everyone else is shouting. Cut away the comforting words and actions of loved ones. We are bereft.

It is not just this scene either. It is what it brings back. Not just the pain of him who is dying. It is our story too. All the dying in and of our lives. All the brokenness we all carry, all the damage that is in us: broken promises, selfishly judged calls; loveless actions; all the things we hate in ourselves; all the things that crucify us. That's what is here.

We stand alone in the midst of everyone else. We all stand alone. We stand alone as this reality confronts us with ourselves. Who we truly are. When we stand before the cross there is nowhere to hide; literally nowhere. It is there and we are here and there is nothing between us.

That is when the healing starts. The broken bread, the broken body offers us nourishment. The doctors say we need to be fed to get better. In the brokenness of Christ our healing begins. We are fed if we receive him. If the bread isn't broken we cannot be sustained. If the body isn't torn we cannot receive. The blood, the gore of death becomes the cup of life. His blood, his wine poured out for our wholeness, our forgiveness.

This is salvation, this is what we are redeemed from; ourselves. The cross allows us to look at ourselves in a new light. We are being told it is okay; our brokenness, our confusion, our sorrow it is healed. If we want it to be. We can come in from the margins were we all think we are. Standing at the foot of the cross new life is coming. A new way; a new dawn.