

“Bread Alone”
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Deuteronomy 26.1-11
Luke 4.1-13
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Having grown up in the PCUSA I often take for granted the beauty of our creeds and confessions. In the PCUSA class that I taught and in talking with students at the college about creeds I was reminded that it isn't something that all Christians use universally. The most common creeds are the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. But even those two are not used by every flavor of Christianity. For some, the creeds can be a point of unification. It can be a common place that we gather and say we may disagree about a variety of theological viewpoints but we can at least agree on these few things. It can be a good starting point for how we live this life of faith together in a challenging world that becomes more and more divisive.

Scripture gives us examples of people living life in difficult times. Over and over we hear in scripture about everyday humans trying to figure out what it means to have faith in challenging moments. Part of the purpose of scripture is to remind us that humans have been doing this for many years and that God has been with humans all this time. It offers hope that we are not alone. The Deuteronomy passage is a type of confession.¹ It explains who the Israelites were as people, where they have been, and the importance of remembering both of those things. This is a liturgical call and response to remember. It is about knowing where we have been in order to know where we are going. These stories connect our common experiences. Remembering lived experiences connects our humanity to others.

I just finished a book by Reyna Grande called *The Distance Between Us*. If you haven't read it, I would highly suggest it. Grande talks about her life growing up in Mexico and how she survived horrendous situations with her family and crossed the border to become citizens here in the United States. Her story is fraught with struggles. As I was reading her story and thinking about this passage, I came across a point in the book where she had already moved to the United States and was working on becoming a citizen and had returned back to Mexico to visit family. Many years had passed and she began to see her life in a new light after returning. As she saw how her cousins were starving, she remembered when she lived there and went hungry. When she saw the dilapidated homes, she remembered how she had lived in those homes and had struggled. She saw her parents in a new light, understanding perhaps a piece of why they were how they were. She connected herself back to this land in which she was born and connected her to her ancestors her parents and to who she was then, and she told herself that she would never forget where she came from.

When we tell stories we are connecting. When we tell our stories we realize that we are not alone. After my sister-in-law gave birth to her stillborn child, she was not able to conceal her grief. Over and over, she told her story and more and more women came to her and said, “I also had a stillborn baby,” or “I also miscarried and I was never able to tell anyone.” Telling stories frees us of the shame and grief that often trap us. Telling stories can connect us to others and also

¹ Thomas Curry, “Deuteronomy 26.11” in *Feasting on the Word, Year C., Vol. 2*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 26.

display how our faith plays a role in all of these stories. We tell our stories at different times and different audiences but when we do, we see the ways in which God is woven within the fabric.

The Deuteronomy passage tells about how the people wandered in the wilderness and had escaped slavery in Egypt. Over and over, they are told to remember this experience so that they do not forget and can connect to people who are currently in that experience. When we remember we have empathy and compassion. God tells the people that they will go to a land of milk and honey - a land of abundance. Part of the deal is that when we live in a land of abundance we also remember the times in which we did not live in abundance. We do this perhaps as a sign of gratitude that pours over into expressing that gratitude through sharing the means that we have.

As I thought about this Deuteronomy passage being a creed, I wondered what it would look like if we wrote a confession in our time. I imagine after the past few years we would address the pandemic and structural racism and the poverty that people have experienced in these difficult times. I imagine that we would lift up Ukraine and the people who are suffering and cry out to God asking questions of why. I imagine that we would affirm a loving God and expressed the miracles that we have witnessed in our lives.

What else would you include in a creed that told a story of this community? In my brief time here, I think that in this communal creed I would encourage you to remember those times that you didn't have leadership in the form of a minister but you had leadership among yourselves. To remember that even when it seemed like you were floating along you truly were guiding one another. I think I would include the ways in which you have reached out to the community with food ministries and the ways in which you have found resources and used those resources to connect with the community. You might mention those times of wilderness in which you felt you had no direction and those times of joy when you could sense God's spirit clearly moving.

The Luke passage talks about Jesus being in the wilderness as well. Just before this passage Jesus had been baptized and was filled with the Spirit. Here he is talking to someone who is named Satan or the Devil. The term in Hebrew is the Accuser. Scripture does not point to an actual individual who is a devil or a Satan. It is anyone who opposes God's purpose. So this could be the person who ran into Jesus in the wilderness asking Jesus to test God.

In boundary trainings I have learned an acronym that I always keep in my head. That acronym is HALT. The letters stand for hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. So that when we are one or more of these emotions we do not always make great choices. When we are hungry, sometimes we become hangry and we snap at people. When we are tired, we do not make good choices, and when we are lonely we do not always make good choices. But when we are aware that we are one of these things we are able to step back and say, "I need a break."

I imagine that Jesus was all of these things in the desert. He hadn't eaten, he was by himself, he hadn't slept, and I don't know if he was angry but I imagine that there were moments of anger. So, he is all of these things and the accuser comes over and asks him to start

performing miracles. I believe the only reason that Jesus makes good choices in these moments is because he was fully human and fully God.

Because the accuser is smart. He never lies but uses scripture which is a reminder than anyone can take scripture out of context. This passage makes me think back to the second creation story in Genesis. The accuser is portrayed as a snake in that passage. And often times people accuse the snake of lying and tricking the humans. But the reality is that the snake never lies. The snake is honest and says, "you were told not to eat that fruit but if you eat that fruit you'll be like God." The snake just doesn't warn them that we really don't want to be like God. And here again the accuser is not lying but is playing to the weakness or supposed weakness of Jesus. For every quote of scripture but the accuser throws at Jesus, Jesus has another response of scripture. Jesus relies heavily on God in this moment. This is a reminder in Lent that we are completely reliant upon God and can do nothing alone.

When asked to turn the stones into bread Jesus tells the accuser that humans cannot live on bread alone. Of course, Jesus is saying that we need more than bread to survive but I also think that Jesus reminds us that we do not eat bread alone. As in, we do not eat bread by ourselves - we eat it within community. We need one another and we need God.

This Sunday communion Sunday the bread and juice brings us together and we find ourselves filled by God's holy meal. Our cup overflows and there's always room at the table. At this table we are filled and we confess and profess our faith, which carries us even when we do not have the words. Throughout Lent we are experiencing different Lenten symbols. On Wednesday we explored ashes and torn fabric which represent lamenting and mourning. Today our symbol is bread. We have talked about bread before and how important it is in our faith. It is so important that we continually gather at this table each month to break bread together and to remember. It is a ritual creed that we gather at this table and say who we believe God to be and who we believe Christ to be and that in those creeds our human language fails but there is such grace that when we eat the bread and drink the cup we are embodying that creed. And it empowers us to go out into the world and to live our faith.

Whenever I gather at the table I think to a man who was houseless who would go up every week and tear the smallest bit of bread. He did not feel that he deserved more than that. And after service there would be a half loaf left over and he did not run to get it. So, I always encourage people to tear off a piece of bread as big as they can because we can always use more Jesus. And we may not feel worthy of that grace but the good news is that we don't have to be. God offers it to us to take and eat and live joyfully. Thanks be to God! Amen.