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“Loaves Abound”

Based on Luke 24:13-25

Monday morning I awoke as ready as I thought I could possibly be to hear feedback on my “ordination paper.” This is a paper that I have been writing on and off over the past few years, and I was at the point of getting direct critique of my writing as well as questions pertaining to my theology. After two years I thought that paper expressed what I needed it too, yet on the drive that morning I realized it was incomplete. It failed to name one important way I have come to understand God and creation.

The moment of realization came as warning lights stood before me and I needed to drive across a narrow bridge over the Connecticut River. As the tires rolled onto the steel frame and I could see the water to my left, right and even below through the grates my hands gripped the steering wheel tightly. The wind was minimal that morning and traffic was light, but my nerves were on edge. Knowing myself, I did not need someone else to drive for me; that would not have helped to calm my nerves. It was as if my mind knew what I needed, and for those thirty or so seconds it took to cross the divide it was a song of faith echoing in my head and heart that provided needed peace. When the car reached the other side I knew the paper was incomplete because I had failed to integrate how important, songs of faith have been on my own journey. And how I sense that music has a way of holding us through tough situations, as well as being a framework for how we understand God. Journeys of faith and theological thought are often illuminated through songs of faith. It is at times of joy that songs of faith fill my head, and it is at times of struggle that the theology found in hymns and songs helps me to find my center and know the ever-presence of the God of all. The title for the message today is “loaves abound” which comes straight out of the hymn we will be singing later. The loaves that abound are the bread that Jesus shared at the Last Supper and the bread offered freely for us. The Lord’s Supper stands before us with an open invitation to join in celebration as an “Easter People.”

The scripture today tells of the disciples encountering the “bread of life” in their midst and for a while not recognizing it. In fact, the scripture tells of the followers questioning Jesus if he knows what has happened; they ask “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” Their eyes had yet to be opened to the Risen Christ present with them, although it seems maybe they could sense something was different as “they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us.’” They were reaching out just like the words of the hymn “Let us Talents and Tongues Employ.”

Let us talents and tongues employ, reaching out with a shout of joy: bread is broken, the wine is poured, Christ is spoken and seen and heard. Jesus lives again; earth can breathe again. Pass the Word around: loaves abound!

I wonder where we find our connection when we are not in a worship service, or surrounded by a community of faith. Where is it that we find connection? What reminds each of us of the sense of belonging that is offered freely, of the presentness of God? Might there be songs, scriptures, or prayers that remain with us each week? Are there specific songs of faith that fill your head when your nerves are on edge, or when you are having a tough day? (ask the congregation for responses).

It seems clear that music can inform our faith, allowing openings in which to meet God.

The communion table is set where bread is shared, loaves of bread are offered freely. The question remains: where do we find that filling bread at other times in our lives? When you have to do something you do not want to do, or are unsure of the outcome, are there faith supports that help or could help? During college one of my summer jobs was less than exciting. Five days a week I would enter “Glass Butterfly” and head to the basement where stacks of boxes would be waiting. My job was to unpack, hang, tag and count all the items of clothing. It was not hard work, but my mind wanted something to think about. Most days in the smelly basement the same song came to mind, filling my thoughts, and I found wisdom beyond my own understanding. Fifteen years later the song still comes to mind even though during that period of time I never found another who knew the song. That is until now. One of those pleasant surprises and moments of connection I have encountered since stepping foot into this community of faith was the day I realized this song that I sang only to myself for over fifteen years was in the Hymnal Supplement. “God is beautiful beyond comprehension,” just as the lyrics of “I Stand in Awe of You” state. When I think I have it all figured out, whether it is my paper or even a relationship, sometimes things get flipped

around. No matter how flipped around life seems to get the songs of faith still harken, inviting us to know that we belong. The second verse of “Let us Talents and Tongues Employ” illuminates the unity and belonging we can find at the table. It says:

***Christ is able to make us one, at his table he set the tone,
teaching people to live to bless, love in word and in deed express.
Jesus lives again; earth can breathe again. Pass the Word around: loaves
abound!***

“Passing the Word around” can be done in various ways. Listening and engaging scripture through the oral tradition of the sermon is only one of many ways of learning about faith, songs are another. Even another is what Letty Russell called “Kitchen Table” theology, the idea that much of our faith develops within conversations and small group encounters, like those which happen around a kitchen table. The place where theology meets the road can often be during crisis situations when children of God both receive and live out the connection to one another they know. As a community of faith we can remember that individual walks vary and that we can gain insight to our journeys by hearing the stories from one another. As an “Easter People” we can come to the Lord’s Table, and the “Kitchen Table,” ready to encounter and share the loaves of bread. Sharing our faith is addressed in the final verse of “Let us Talents and Tongues Employ.” The Lyrics say:

***Jesus calls us in, sends us out bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share: God (Immanuel) everywhere!
Jesus lives again; earth can breathe again. Pass the Word around: loaves
abound!***

Today we dedicated a group from our community who have committed to going to the Gulf Coast as short-term missionaries. As the song says we are both called in and sent out. We have been offered love and bread, enough to receive and enough to share. Because “Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again.” At the table the followers’ eyes were open in the breaking of the bread and they proclaimed the risen Christ. Today and tomorrow we can proclaim our belonging and welcome at the table. We can say it with our words, we can live it with our action, and we can hear it in our songs of faith. What are the words of faith, the encounters of God, and the songs of faith that remain in your heart each day? May the “loaves abound” this morning and throughout our daily walk. Let and sing the song of faith entitled “Let us Talents and Tongues Employ” no. 514, proclaiming the risen Christ, the bread offered, and the creation free to breathe again.