

It's Not About the Bread

by Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins

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Ephesians 6.10, 18; Mark 14.22-23, 25-26

We've been hearing a lot about bread for about five weeks already.

July 26 – Jesus feeds a multitude with 5 loaves and 2 fish (Mk. 6.35-43).

Aug 2 – Jesus calls himself the bread of life (Jn. 6.33-35).

Aug 9 – Jesus is still calling himself living bread (Jn. 6.48-51).

Aug 16 – Lady Wisdom says, “Eat my bread and drink my wine” (Prov. 9.1, 5-6).

Aug 23 – Jesus shares bread and wine with a group at table (Mk. 14.22-23, 25-26).

I've spent 8 months trying to lose weight. January through April were typical...I'd go to the gym, and then I wouldn't. I'd swear off beer and desserts, and then I'd swear off swearing off beer and desserts. I'd try portion control, and then I'd forget to try portion control. I'd drink Slim-fast, which I found to be especially delicious and filling when I would add ice cream and Bailey's to it. I'd lose 5 or 6 pounds, plateau, gain them back, lose them again, and so on.

But then in May I got serious, and more importantly, I got someone to share my seriousness, and we have been working out obsessively ever since. About two months ago I went to the doctor, mounted the scales only to discover that I hadn't lost an ounce! I was furious. I complained to my doctor that she must be doing something wrong, because I've been elypticizing myself into a stupor.

She gave me the old tired “muscle weighs more than fat” routine and she assured me that I did in fact look a little smaller. She assured me my blood pressure and cholesterol were perfect. Great. Not once has anyone ever said to me, “Hey, you're looking less hypertensive these days.” Still, I had noticed that my clothes were fitting more loosely, regardless of what that satanic scale said.

Then one day, one magical, miraculous, amazing day when unicorns and fairies and butterflies frolicked from village to dell singing and playing and spreading sunshine, I went to buy new clothes for a trip I was taking and had to buy pants 2 inches smaller in the waist. It was a glorious moment in time.

Then, I started adding wii aerobics to my fitness routine. Well, evil wii weighs you so it can monitor your progress. So, I braced myself for the hateful wii news, only be told by the sweetest most melodic computerized voice ever that I had lost weight...a significant amount of weight. God bless you anonymous wii woman!

Then last night, I noticed a shirt in the back of the closet. I took it out thinking I might wear it to the organ concert. But then I figured out why it was in the back of the closet...the neck was an inch and half smaller than the size I've been wearing for about 3 years. Sigh. But then I said to myself, “Self...you've lost some weight...maybe you could squeeze into it and even if its uncomfortable you could survive one night.” PS – it fit! It fit perfectly. It wasn't the least bit snug. I was almost late for the concert because of the out of body experience I was having...out of a much less corpulent body experience that is.

Some people start a diet and lose 10, 15 pounds in a couple of weeks. I think its OK to hate such people. Others do a few pushups and in a month are ready to start a modeling career. These people, also, should have plagues of frogs and locusts visited upon them. But nevertheless, after 8 torturous months, some of them not affording me a single pound of reduction, finally I can say I have lost 2 inches in the waist, an inch and half in the neck, and 17 pounds total. That's a little more than half my goal...I hope it doesn't take another 8 months for the other half, but even if it does, I'm hopeful that I can do it.

So with this long, slow, and finally somewhat successful struggle, do I need to read and hear and preach about bread and wine and fish week after week after week? Whose idea of a sick joke is this? I leave church and all I can think about is buttery, flakey, delicious pastry and bread delicacies. Whatever happened to lead us not into temptation?

But then, from the late first century, someone says to me: *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of divine power. Pray at all times, and keep alert and keep praying not only for yourself but for everyone else.*

And somehow, that's the real point. Not whether or not I'm motivated to get to the gym. Not how badly my ego is bruised or how dangerously my health is threatened by weight gain, not even how excited I am after three years of kevetching and 8 months of working at it to finally have experienced some noticeable progress in my weight loss endeavors. The real point is that we are never healed alone. That means, your healing, your progress, your blessing is good for someone; someone else's healing, progress, blessing is also good for you. Because we are all part of the interconnected web of existence, when one is blessed, the blessing is shared, just as when one is hurting, the pain is shared.

MCC held its first worship service ever on October 6, 1968 in Southern California. MCC predates stonewall by almost year. MCC predates the consecration of Gene Robinson as the Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire by 35 years. MCC predates the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America deciding that gays and lesbians in committed relationships can have those relationships blessed and can answer a calling to professional ministry by 41 years. But it isn't important who did it first. What is important that the healing that MCC represents could not have happened in a vacuum. Because a church like MCC was raised up to celebrate the sacred value of all people, to affirm the goodness of human sexuality, and to declare that God's love is all-inclusive and unconditional, other churches were bound to follow that prophetic lead. And more will yet...because we are never healed alone. The healing that began with MCC was bound to spread to the Anglicans and to the Lutherans and to the Congregationalists and in the fullness of time there will more Christians who celebrate love in all its beautiful diversity than those who do not.

Pray...not just with your words but with your thoughts and with your attitude and with your actions...and keep praying, and know that as you pray for your Good you are also helping others, because we are all connected. The good that is yours is not really yours alone...it helps us all.

I joke about my weight problems, and that isn't to insult anyone who has done the hard work of losing weight with more success than I've had; nor is it to insult those who have not yet had much success with weight loss. It's hard, and some people are perfectly happy the way they are. And you know what, if you feel good and your doctor says you're health is good, then celebrate that and don't let anyone tell you that you are anything other than perfect.

But if you need to lose some weight, or gain some weight, or go through any sort of process or procedure to improve your health, then I do want to say: others have walked that road ahead of you. They've paved the way, showing us that victories are possible. We aren't healed alone. The healing of others encourages us; our victories will encourage others. Take strength from divine love, and know that your efforts and prayers are benefiting not only you but someone else as well.

Maybe that's what that special meal in Mark 14 is about today. You see, these last five weeks haven't really been about the bread. The story of the feeding the multitude is a story about sharing, caring, noticing that others are in need. Those loaves and fish are symbols of the compassion that sustains people when it is shared.

The story of Jesus calling himself bread is a reminder of our unity...like all the ingredients that go into a loaf of bread, we are all part of the one Life, the divine life that expressed so powerfully through Jesus.

The story of divine Wisdom inviting us to eat at her table is a reminder that we are all invited to the table of abundant life...no one is excluded.

And today, we have another story of invitation, of sharing, of unity...and once again it is told with the symbol of bread. Jesus gives the bread to everyone at table, leaving no one out. He shares a cup with everyone at table and they all drink from it.

When we share our worship experiences, our prayers, our singing, our rituals...we are actually sharing ourselves, getting what we need, giving to others what they need. And in that loving exchange, miracles seem to take place. Uniting, caring, sharing, remembering our connectedness is what all these stories are really about. It's not about the bread; it's about remembering that we don't get healed alone. We come together. Someone gets blessed. Because they are blessed, they can share their blessing. The blessings multiply; they were never just for one. Bread and wine, eating and feeding, fellowship and faith, sharing and healing, living and growing...these things go together. It's not about the bread, or who can have it or who can't...it's about divine love that is never withheld from anybody for any reason. It's about the hope and healing this truth can give. And this is the good news. Amen.

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**God, touch my body.
God, touch my emotions.
God, touch my relationships.
God, touch my finances.
Bless me to bless others;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

“When I am healed I am not healed alone. And I would share my healing with the world...” *A Course in Miracles*