

Bread!

Isaiah 58:6-9

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Audio: www.buzzsprout.com/admin/episodes/312842-bread

It was there, staring us in the face. The bold truth that did not come from pulpit or nonprofit humanitarian organization. It came from *National Geographic* in its May, 2014 issue: "to feed our hungry planet we must change the way we farm--and the way we think." As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread, not my daily bread [*Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 73].

A large church in Houston, TX tells about one of their secretaries. She remembers her grandparents telling about the oppressive Communist regime in their native Czechoslovakia. They were evangelicals who loved Christ and the Bible. When authorities would come around unannounced to confiscate their Bibles, her family would often hide the copy of God's Word inside a large, round loaf of bread. The family still owns those baked Bibles, which perhaps continued to give off a faint whiff of the bakery.

Maybe that story captures the essence of both worlds--the otherworldliness of God's sacred text and the earthy, practical, concrete world of food, bread, grub. Maybe all of our Bibles should smell like warm, baked bread, so we can keep these two worlds together. Isaiah kept those two worlds one. But in our text, God's people had split those worlds. They had a private piety. They had the wrong kind of religious busyness--following rules, private piety. Our religion, like theirs, can degenerate into a process of relieving our middle class guilt and merely serving ourselves. In the words of Walter Brueggemann, such religion is nice, but it doesn't deal with "neighbor questions" [*Texts for Preaching, Year A*, p. 128].

What are the neighbor questions? Read vv. 6-8. Pope Francis has said first we pray for the hungry and then we feed them. There is no separation. Private piety does not get at the root of the disarray in our world. It doesn't get at God's reign on earth. Read vv. 8-9. Now I can see how some might read this as a "works salvation" formula (feed the poor and then God will love/save you). **Our relationship with others does not create our relationship with God; our relationship with others reveals our relationship with God.**

Pastor Glen Bengson has written that as he attempts to live out his faith regarding hunger, he tries to balance six areas: praying, giving money, volunteering, adjusting his lifestyle, educating and advocacy work [*Hunger for the Word, Year A*, p. 57].

You see, we can give money to the Food Bank or Bread for the World, help with our church's community meals and Thanksgiving meals. And all of that is wonderful. But it's treating symptoms, not causes. What about policy? What about systems that are out of whack? Suzii Paynter, Executive Coordinator of CBF, took part last week in a meeting with over 100 faith

group leaders, calling for a national shift in priorities, in order to end hunger here and globally by 2030.

In the narthex today, you will find a sheet with the contact information for our U.S. congressional delegation, and an explanation about some hunger issues which are drawing bipartisan support. I urge you to take a copy and to put feet to your prayers.

Several years ago, our daughter Kristen was flying back from the East Coast to visit us. Before she left the New York airport, she had stopped at her favorite bakery and purchased this large, delicious loaf of bread. Due to bad weather, her connecting flight got stalled on the tarmac in Cleveland. This was before rules were in place as to how long passengers could be kept in a plane during a delay. As passengers endured the warm, crowded airplane cabin, Kristen started passing around pinches of bread. All she had left when she arrived at KCI were crumbs...and a beautiful story of sharing. Bread. It seems to fix a lot of problems, doesn't it?