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Subversive Celebrant - feeding at the table of conspirators

Sara Miles was a chef, a left-wing journalist, war correspondent and an atheist; she is a lesbian. This is her story: ⁱ

“I walked into the church out of curiosity. I had no earthly reason to be there. I had never heard a gospel reading, never said the Lord’s Prayer. I was certainly not interested in becoming a Christian. I, walked in, took a chair, and tried not to catch anyone’s eye. We sat down, stood up, sang, sat down, waited and listened and stood up and sang. “Jesus invites everyone to his table” a woman announced.

“We gathered around the table. Someone was putting a piece of fresh crumbly bread into my hands, saying “This is the body of Christ” and handing me the goblet of sweet wine, saying “the blood of Christ” and then something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me. I still can’t explain. It made no sense. I felt as if I had just stepped off a curb or been knocked over painlessly, from behind. The disconnect between what I thought was happening - I was eating a piece of bread; what I heard someone else say was happening – the bread was ‘the body of Christ’; and what I *knew* was happening – God, named ‘Christ’ or ‘Jesus’ was real, and in my mouth!

“All the way home, shocked, I scrambled for explanations. Maybe I was hypersuggestible, surrounded by believers pushing me into accepting their superstitions. My tears were just pent-up sadness after a long hard decade, spilling out because I was in a place where I could cry anonymously. Really the whole thing must have been about emotion: the music, the movement, the light ...

“Yet that impossible word, *Jesus*, lodged in me like a crumb. I said it over and over to myself, as if repetition would help me understand. I had no idea what it meant; I did not know what to do with it. But it was more real than any thought of mine, or any subjective emotion: it was as real as the actual taste of bread and wine. And the word was indisputable in my body now, as if I had swallowed a radioactive pellet that would outlive my own flesh.” ·

As a result of this experience Sara went on to found The Food Pantry, which currently provides free groceries to about 500 hungry families a week, from around the altar at St Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. It buys in between six and eight tons of food each week, and offers it free to everyone who comes. Families select the food they need from a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, bread, rice, pasta, beans, cereal, and dry goods. The Food Pantry is run entirely by volunteers, most of them people who came to get food and stayed to help out.ⁱⁱ

Sara insists The Food Pantry is not an act of outreach but expresses gratitude to God who meets the needs of our own hunger in abundance. The bags full of macaroni and peanut butter that are given to strangers are in remembrance of him.ⁱⁱⁱ The fact that it takes place around the central table of the altar is crucial. This is neither a charity nor a food-kitchen for the poor; it is a eucharist community.

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The stories about Jesus and the earliest community gathered around him make one thing very clear; the only physical thing Jesus leaves us, with which to build the church, is a table with food on it.^{iv}

Taking the daily Palestinian peasant meal, giving it focus in terms of himself and his message of *shalom*, and placing it as the cornerstone of the new community was an act of creative genius. The truth is that the most inclusive image of the life, death, resurrection of Jesus is not the cross but a meal.

Why did Jesus choose a meal table as the cornerstone of being church?

In making the meal central Jesus connects with something deeply primal. One of the first things to identify human beings within wild nature was the hearth. More than 30,000 years ago the cooking fire enabled people to prepare food that was no longer raw. It became the centre around which the family or community gathered to eat face to face, talking, smiling, laughing, storytelling and sharing food. Initially fire would have been a threat and danger, and eye contact across a central food source being encircled by individuals with open mouths and exposed teeth would have suggested hostility. At some point these danger signals were transformed into the very essence of welcome and acceptance.^v

So the shared meal now marks the stages of the day, moments for celebration, communication and the expression of acceptance. The hearth and the food table have become the very womb of all human culture.^{vi}

How would you explain the miracle of the meal in human development?

Watching a documentary series about the people of eastern Europe, I was struck how while travelling from country to country the reporter's most significant moments all took place around the meal table, with a family or community sharing bread, wine and local dishes in abundance.^{vii} There was intimate and animated conversation, laughter and sometimes tears and respectful silence for a storyteller. Many times a sudden spontaneous voice would begin to sing, beautifully above the clamorous talking. Initially a solo, others would soon join in, as the tempo rose chairs would be pushed aside, musical instruments would seem to appear from nowhere and dancing would begin. As the rhythm slowed, people returned to the table and the eating and conversation would be resumed. Reflecting on the series I kept thinking, "This is how Jesus intended church to be, this is the essence of the Peacemeal."

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I love the word 'conspiracy'; it literally means 'breathing together'. It emphasises being connected and committed in a shared moment, breathing as one; like a rowing team pulling the last few meters towards the winning line, a choir singing in unison at the climax of a great oratorio, or a couple making love. Yet our modern use of the word has given the shared connection and commitment of 'conspiracy' a subversive twist. For me it sparks the image of a small group of people in the dark cellar of a tavern or alehouse, huddled around an oak beer-keg with a candle or storm lantern at the centre, breathing together as they plot and plan a new political order.

We have seen that 'breath' and 'breathing' are the universal picture of spirituality.

I have long felt this is how we should visualise church. A community of faith committed to the shared cosmic vision of *shalom*, gathered round a table with food, connected to each other in love, breathing together the life and power of the Spirit as we scheme and organise in very practical ways how to play our part in the transfiguration of the status quo.

This is the Peacemeal and it is explosive.

The simplicity of this meal disguises its depth and astonishing power. Every single aspect of what it means to live from a Jesus perspective is embedded within this meal; every element of truth is there to be discovered and shared. It can also find authentic expression in any and every culture of the world without importing any alien elements. It offers both the reality and mystery of profound spiritual encounter, touching us with the fingerprint of fire, as we saw in Sara Miles' story, while at the same time the opportunity and challenge of meeting the very physical needs of the hungry and destitute. This ordinary meal when celebrated authentically should provoke our society to look hard at its attitudes and become a means - as I have said before - of 'turning the world upside down'.^{viii} Placing this meal at the centre of our understanding of community and society – a meal that is seemingly so simple and innocuous, yet in the light of the person of Jesus, so explosive and disturbing – is why I see myself as a 'Subversive Celebrant'.

What is your reaction to church as a community of conspirators?

This meal is also vital in our search for identity. It is never found in individuality, only in community - this truth is powerfully expressed in the Xhosa word *ubuntu*, from southern Africa, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu among others has highlighted.^{ix} *Ubuntu* describes an approach to life that can be translated as, 'a person is a person only through other people', or that 'I am because we are'; sharing the Peacemeal emphatically makes this point. *Ubuntu* also recognises the worth of all others and acts for their benefit; it is generous, hospitable and compassionate, caring and sharing, it is about friendship and reconciliation; relationships are priority. Each interconnected person is unique and of great worth - in biblical terms 'made in the image and likeness of God'. It also touches the essence of what we understand about being 'the Body of Christ', which is so important to this meal.^x The parallels between *ubuntu* and *shalom* are exciting, we shall discover them woven throughout the fabric of the Peacemeal as we continue.

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Each summer in Britain there is a huge Christian music and arts festival called 'Greenbelt', the centrepiece of which is a Sunday morning communion service. Always inspiring, wonderfully creative, but understandably restricted to a small piece of bread and sip of wine due to the many thousands of people participating. Over the years of attending I have endeavoured to subvert proceedings by arriving with bags filled with large loaves of bread, piles of soft fruit, and boxes of red wine with pint beer glasses to serve it in. At the point when we gather in small groups to share the bread and wine I encourage everyone around to rip up the loaves and along with the fruit and wine to share it within the group and then as widely as possible among other groups. On one occasion a Baptist minister got caught up in the eucharistic mayhem we were creating; he later reflected:

" ... large loaves of bread, fresh fruit and a wine box, no less, were being passed around us: 'have more' being the refrain. Any sense of unfamiliarity or

even guilty irreverence soon dissolved into joyous liberation. Growing up conservative evangelical, my singular experience of communion was the ubiquitous grape juice shot glasses and a tiny cube of bread. As a pastor I have always struggled with the rather stilted or artificial nature of the 'meal', so being invited to 'have more' of the bread, the fruit and the wine, of Christ's presence in me, of fellowship was truly a wonderful experience. The fact we didn't all know each other yet we celebrated in abundance the unity of the body, the wholeness in knowing Christ as a group: the reality of communion became dramatic. No longer was it about 'nip and sip' in solemnity it was about joyous abundance, a celebration of what Christ has done for us." ^{xi}

How can this communal meal, given by Jesus to his community have been reduced to 'nip and sip' in almost every Christian tradition? Why is it no longer a proper meal? Why have we forgotten that all the stories of Jesus feeding multitudes say, 'they all had as much as they wanted', being 'filled' and 'satisfied'? Why has the sense of abundance evaporated?^{xii} What were the influences behind the original Peacemeal and where has it gone so wrong?

The early Jesus-community understood the Peacemeal to be foundational, based on the example of Jesus himself for whom 'table fellowship' was central.^{xiii} He clearly loved the whole eating experience; you simply cannot be called 'a glutton and a drunkard', however unkind its intention, without there being some basis for it.^{xiv} Notice how often we see Jesus at the meal table - sometimes just with his disciples, on other occasions as an invited guest or even inviting himself as a guest.

Much of his teaching took place during a shared meal; among other things he used its imagery as a picture of the future. He scandalised public opinion by regularly 'eating with tax collectors and sinners',^{xv} shattering social boundaries, affirming access to God without intermediaries and revolutionising the popular ideas of holiness and purity.^{xvi}

One Jewish scholar has noted that this activity above all others is what marked Jesus out from his contemporaries, 'He took his stand among the pariahs of his world, those despised by the respectable. Sinners were his table companions and the ostracized tax collector and prostitute his friends'.^{xvii}

To sit at table with someone was an expression of intimacy and fellowship, to invite someone to a meal was to honour them and express trust and acceptance. In this way prostitutes find forgiveness; tax collectors are liberated from their ill-gotten wealth and inspired to distribute it to the poor and the hungry are fed. This is our example.

What would subversive table fellowship in your neighbourhood look like?

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Just hours before his arrest and execution, Jesus shared *Pesach* - the Passover meal - with his closest friends in Jerusalem.^{xviii} This centuries old tradition is shaped around drinking four cups of wine - each with a distinctive name and theme - with a full meal as its centrepiece.^{xix} Jesus gave it completely new meaning.

The meal started in the time-honoured custom of sharing the first two cups of wine with their respective themes of, "To life" and then "To freedom" along with the retelling the Exodus story. Then Jesus began the main meal by taking unleavened *matzos* and breaking it, dividing it among the group, not with the usual words, but the astonishing

declaration, “This is my body”. The meal concludes with a beautiful blessing and everyone sharing the third cup of wine with its theme, “To *shalom*”. Again Jesus startles the group, saying, “This is my blood”. After singing Psalm 118 together they left the room, crossed the Kidron valley to the olive groves of Gethsemane where later that night Jesus would be arrested. The fourth cup of wine, with its theme “To Jerusalem” - ‘the dwelling place of *shalom*’ - and its message of future hope was left on the table untouched, hinting at events yet to unfold. Jesus’ actions and words were shocking and disturbing, but they become the vital catalyst in the birth of the Peacemeal.

Following Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, women and men closest to him encountered him in resurrection power on several occasions in the context of a meal. Travelling home from Jerusalem one night two disciples met a stranger on the open road, inviting him to share supper they realise it is Jesus - ‘he was known to them in the breaking of bread’.^{xx}

At dawn on the shore of lake Galilee a stranger calls to a group in a fishing boat, “Come and have breakfast”; we are told - “they knew it was the Lord”.^{xxi}

The Peacemeal does not simply remember Jesus’ life and death but celebrates his resurrection and all its implications, which is why it so often took place ‘on the first day of the week’, Sunday, the day of the resurrection.^{xxii}

Seven weeks later, at the Jewish feast of *Shavuoth*,^{xxiii} the bewildered Jesus-community received the promised empowering gift of the Spirit. These *Pentecost*^{xxiv} events transfigured them and once more found their focus around the sharing of food and the material resources they had:

‘All who believed were together and had all things in common;
they would sell their possessions and goods
and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need ...
they broke bread in one another’s homes
and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,
praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people’^{xxv}

The meal became the cornerstone of the community. Jesus’ teaching and example were at its core; but it also built on the foundation of four important Hebrew meals, which were eaten:

- *Daily*: this was ‘supper’, the main family meal of the day. It had *koinonia* - ‘a relationship of sharing’ - as its focus, from which the word ‘communion’ would later develop. It is also picked up in the frequently used phrase, ‘the Lord’s supper’;^{xxvi}
- *Weekly*: this was the Friday evening *Shabbat* meal. It had ‘covenant’ (*berith*) and ‘steadfast love’ (*chesed*) as its theme, which the *rabbis* translated with the little-used Greek word *agape* - as ‘unconditional love’. The early Jesus-community often called the meal ‘the *Agape*’, and gave deeper meaning to the traditional declaration of that evening - “*Shabbat Shalom*”;
- *Annually*: this was the *Pesach*-Passover spring festival meal. Remembering the Exodus from Egypt, from slavery to freedom. This was ‘thanksgiving’ - as in the Greek word *eucharisteo* - from which Christians developed the name ‘eucharist’, which has *charis* - meaning ‘grace’ - at its heart: an ‘extravagant beautiful gift’;
- *Finally*: this looks forward to the ‘Messianic banquet’ yet to come. When all the nations and peoples of the earth will participate.^{xxvii} Later the Latin word *missio* - ‘to send’ - was

used to emphasise this, a 'missionary meal' - sent out to invite others in - eventually re-vocalised as 'the Mass'.

The Peacemeal is most frequently referred to by the Hebrew phrase *paras lechem* - 'breaking bread' - which refers to the Palestinian custom of breaking a loaf of bread with the hands at the beginning of a meal along with words of thanksgiving and then tearing and sharing the bread together while eating the meal (never cutting it with a knife).^{xxviii} The phrase became a euphemism for, 'to share a meal together'. Occasionally the Peacemeal was also referred to as a 'love feast', fusing *agape* and *paras lechem* together.^{xxix}

From the very beginning the meal was seen not only as a celebration of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus but as a way of making sure the poor and needy in the community had sufficient food. This is why the Christians in Corinth were condemned when they failed to share their food with the poor. They corrupted the 'Lord's supper' and as a result 'many were weak and ill and some died' - due to malnutrition.^{xxx}

A Peacemeal that does not feed the poor cannot claim to proclaim Jesus.^{xxxi}

At the beginning of the third century CE the Peacemeal was still being shared both as a family meal at home and also as a wider community meal.^{xxxii} However, by the end of the same century the heart had been ripped out of it by church authorities; the bread and wine were isolated, put on a pedestal and called 'the *Eucharist*', while the meal itself was relegated to a charity supper, which the rich gave to the poor and called 'the *Agape*'.^{xxxiii}

This act of vandalism not only destroyed the Peacemeal but also fractured the very understanding of what it means to be church, something from which we have never recovered.^{xxxiv}

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All food is sacred because it enables life. Across world-faiths it is understood to have a source beyond itself, it is a God-given gift and a point of connection with the spirit.

This truth is at the heart of the Peacemeal; it is a mystery but no less a reality. The word used in relation to this is 'sacrament' from the Latin *sacramentum*; which in its contemporary sense means making invisible truth physically tangible.^{xxxv} This meal is Jesus-centred; not only should our bodies be physically nourished with the food but also spiritually energised.

The words of Jesus, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" are clearly the starting point for encounter. The tragedy is not only have the bread and wine been ripped from their place at the heart of a full meal, but also their understanding has become polarised. Some Christians insisting only special words by special people can enable them to *become* the body and blood of Jesus,^{xxxvi} while others argue the bread and wine only *represent* them.^{xxxvii} Neither view stands up to scrutiny. Jesus could not be clearer, "This *is* my body-blood"; it does not *become*, it does not *represent*, it simply *is*. A mystery, yes, but also a demonstration of the power and presence of the Spirit and the holistic nature of reality we discussed previously, with the spiritual and physical seamlessly and potently interfused.

When Jesus makes his 'bread-body' and 'wine-blood' declarations he is primarily saying, "This is me".^{xxxviii} The physical act of sharing is vital because in doing so we become interwoven with him and one another as we eat, through the presence of the Spirit, even if

all the participants don't recognise it. There is something simple, beautiful truthful and powerful in this enigma, yet it is also disquieting. Jesus had previously said:

Unless you chew the flesh of the son of man and
drink his blood you have no life in you' ^{xxxix}

This is a vegan meal with cannibalistic overtones; so typical of Jesus to disturb and shock us into really thinking deeply about the true intensity of experiencing oneness.^{xi}

Why can't the simplicity and mystery of Jesus' words just be accepted?
In using bread and wine to say, "This is me" what do you think he is implying?

This meal is about relationship, vertical and horizontal, with God and one another, a family meal with covenant at its heart. It has been said, "If I break bread with you, I am telling you I'm prepared to die for you". This is not unlike *diyafa*, the hospitality covenant of the desert Bedouin, where no traveller, even a sworn enemy, is ever turned away but given food, shelter and protection and then able to leave in peace. Once food and drink are shared the host would give his life to keep the guest safe if there was an attack on them.

The dimensions and possibilities of this meal are infinite. Jesus is remembered and his body is re-remembered in reconciliation, forgiveness and healing in the wholeness of atonement-*shalom*. This meal is for a 'society of friends' who sharing 'the kiss of peace' declares that each relationship is right.^{xii}

Here are people who are breathing together.

It is also a lovers tryst around a table of devotion. Andrei Rublev's sublime icon of 'The Holy Trinity' - based on the story of Abraham welcoming God in the form of three strangers at the Oaks of Mamre, where he prepares them food - captures this; each figure with the beautiful face of an identical sister and the body of a young man looking into each other's eyes.^{xiii} On the table between them is a goblet of wine with space for another to join them - we are invited to be that person. The Peacemeal is a response to that invitation and another means by which *epektasis* takes place, enabling us to 'reach forward' and become more and more like God.^{xiiii}

This really is feeding on the Tree of Life.

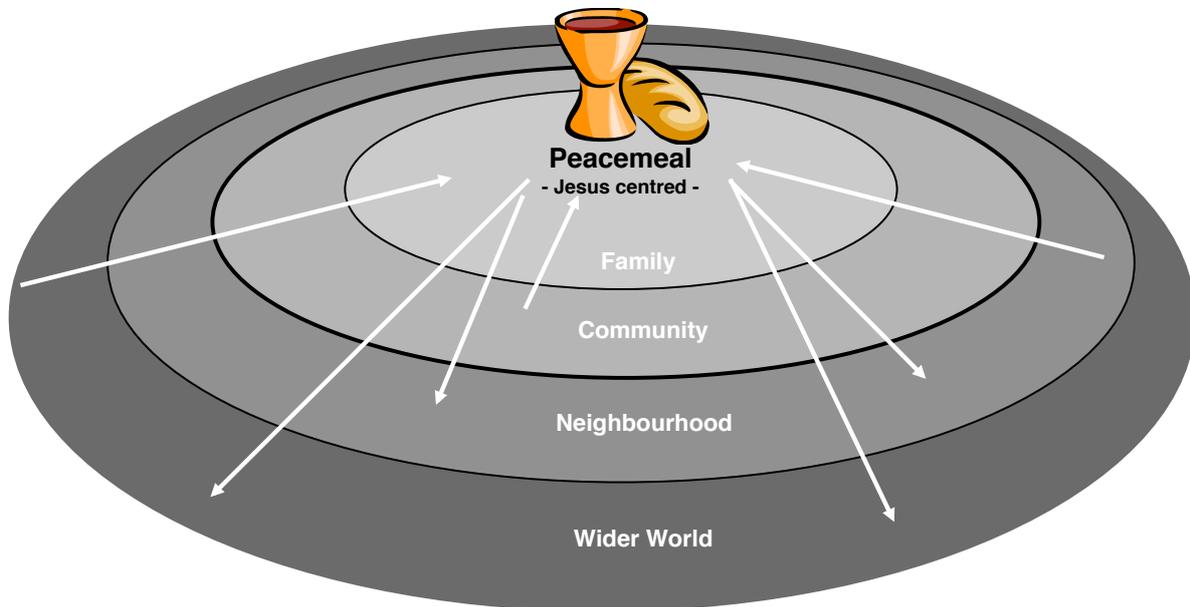
This meal combines the present with the future, it is "... until he comes";^{xiv} it is the hors d'oeuvres of messianic banquet. It is filled with anticipation and wild hope. Jesus asks us to pray:

"Give us today our daily bread"^{xlv}

The word *epiousion*, translated 'daily' is an intriguing word, with a possible double meaning, not only 'sufficient' for today but also the bread of 'tomorrow'.^{xvi} The Peacemeal not only empowers us for the *shalom* activism needed today and provides the food with which to feed the needy, but it is also energised by the life of the age to come and is a sign about tomorrow and the renewed creation.

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The conspiracy of the Peacemeal leads to both compassion and action, it involves the community in sharing and declaring as we work towards the transfiguration of the status quo.



The Peacemeal is *centripetal* - from the Latin: 'to seek the centre', or 'drawn towards the centre'. The word is, "Come!" It is an open circle with the risen Jesus at its centre, welcoming everyone.^{xlvii}

"Come, eat my bread and drink my wine I have mixed"^{xlviii}

"Come, for everything is now ready now"^{xlix}

There is only one table and it is open to all. What each guest experiences will depend on their relationship to the host and their spiritual openness; some may simply have their physical hunger satisfied, while others discover transformation, in each case something significant is happening. It is the place and space where God is at work.

As it is a family meal children must be at its heart, participating as soon as they are physically able to do so. Jesus is uncompromising on the subject:

"Let the little children come to me;
do not stop them;
for it is as to such as these the kingdom of God belongs"ⁱ

The whole community will learn from them. Some of my most significant experiences of breaking bread have been in the company of children; their innocence, enthusiasm, openness and innate spiritual understanding of the significance of the meal is always astonishing.ⁱⁱ

Hospitality is expressing kindness to strangers, being welcoming and generous towards guests. It is about the extravagant expression of grace towards others. There is a blurring of the line between host and guest; giving and receiving become a continuous whole. It is, of course, a challenging path, because we come up against our own fears and insecurities, yet each step is an adventure of trust and vulnerability. We create sanctuary for the insecure, a place of acceptance, healing and forgiveness for the broken; somewhere we can serve the needs of others. Take note also of Desmond Tutu's words, "When you are feeding the people, you are feeding God" ⁱⁱⁱ

How can we nurture a culture of hospitality and welcome?

It was a Sunday evening. I will never forget the look on their faces. They were a young homeless couple, living in a derelict council house on a tough south London estate, a few doors down from someone in our community. Discovering they hadn't eaten for four days she said, "Come to church with me tonight and have a good meal". They walked nervously through the door into a room set out for a feast - our Sunday service, "Wow" they gasped, "We didn't know church was like this!" Sadly, most times it isn't - but it should be.

What do you think of the declaration, "No eating, no meeting?"

The Peacemeal is *centrifugal* - from the Latin: 'to flee the centre', or 'dispersed from the centre'. The word is, "Go!" Jesus sends us out into society; this is a 'missionary meal'.

"Go ... into the streets and lanes of the town,
bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame ...
Go, out into the roads and byways,
and compel people to come in, so my house may be filled ^{liii}

Here being a 'Wisdom Dancer' and 'Subversive Celebrant' intertwine. We take the invitation to the meal out to where people are; we feed them where we find them, we embrace them in their need. We need creative and imaginative approaches, everywhere leaving footprints of peace.

'SPEAK' - the student and young adult's peace and justice network^{liv} - planned a day of action on one of London's busiest streets outside a UK government agency that funds private arms deals across the globe; activity aiding repression, harming development and fueling conflict. The day climaxed with a huge crowd of us celebrating 'Peacemeal on the Pavement', a liturgy they had invited me to write and lead, which involved declaring the truth, covering a large cardboard tank with beautiful flowers, singing and dancing and sharing bread and wine among ourselves but also with passers by. As one participant on the day reflected:

"We were highlighting the injustice of our government's complicity in suffering caused by its arms sales around the globe, and our mustard-seed-scale demonstration in front of their offices was laden with symbolism, a glimpse of the kingdom. The bread-body of Jesus' weakness became our strength; the wine-blood of Jesus' despair became our joy. I remember feeling liberated from my English repression by three times shouting "Shalom!" at the towering office block. The flowers - a symbol of peace and justice - prophesied over the seeds and deeds sown within that building".^{lv}

More and more people are discovering the creative and provocative possibilities of the Peacemeal, this subversive celebration that feeds Jesus to the world. Feeding the hungry,

sharing food with our enemies, eating in a way that is gentle with animals and wild nature, anticipating the messianic banquet.

In what other ways can we put the Peacemeal as a voice for justice on the streets?

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Half way between the two great cathedrals facing each other across the seaport city of Liverpool, above a radical community bookshop, is 'Somewhere Else' - better known to everyone as 'Bread Church'.^{lvi}

We arrived a little late; the large room was already full of people standing at rows of long trestle tables kneading dough - children, parents, young adults and senior citizens. This morning there was also a group with learning difficulties participating, accompanied by their tutors from a local college. Warmly greeted by Barbara Glasson,^{lvii} the Methodist minister whose vision brought it all into being, we put on aprons, filled a large plastic bowl with flour and began mixing our dough and talking with those around us. Once the bread was in the oven we shared a simple liturgy together. Tables were then cleared, soup bowls set out for a nourishing meal accompanied by hot fresh bread rolls. Everyone shared the washing up and cleaning the room. This space is home to 'Bread Church' every Tuesday and Thursday morning with Sunday worship once a month, it is also a spiritual sanctuary for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, the survivors of abuse and the homeless from the city streets.

We left, taking our two loaves of bread, one to eat at home and the other to give away. I was reminded of the early Celtic tradition, "Whenever you break bread make sure you take a piece of the loaf away with you to share with a stranger on the way home."

Endnote:

ⁱ From Sara Miles *'Take This Bread'* Ballantine Books 2008; 57-59; edited for focus and space

ⁱⁱ See http://www.saramiles.net/food_pantry

ⁱⁱⁱ See Sara Miles *'Take This Bread'* Ballantine Books 2008; 116

^{iv} I am using the word 'table' here, not only with specific reference to food and eating a meal, but also as a symbol / metaphor of relationship and community that is expressed by it and flows from it as this whole chapter will make clear. I also recognise that to build church Jesus also leaves us with the memories of his teaching and the empowering of the Spirit, but the only physical thing is the table

^v I can't resist inappropriately applying the words from Psalm 23:5, 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies'

^{vi} See Martin Jones *'Feast: Why Humans Share Food'*, Oxford University Press 2007; 1-2, the whole book is quite fascinating

^{vii} See Michael Palin *'Michael Palin's New Europe'* BBC DVD 2007

^{viii} Acts 17:6

^{ix} See Desmond Tutu *'No Future Without Forgiveness'* Rider Books 1999; 34-36 and *'God is not a Christian: speaking truth in time of crisis'* Rider Books 2011; 21-24 also

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy)). The worldview expressed in the word *ubuntu* is found across the languages of southern Africa; *botho* in the Tswana language of Botswana, *uMunthu* in the Chewe of Malawi, *obuntu* in the Kitara of Uganda and Tansania and *unhu* in the Shona of Zimbabwe to name a few

^x See 1Cor 11:24,29 and 12:12 among many other texts

^{xi} I am grateful to Rev Phil Barnard for these reflections. On a later occasion he invited me to lead an Easter Sunday service where three congregations from different churches came together to celebrate a Peacemeal with a focus on the risen Jesus in the context of a full meal which included an abundance of bread and wine

^{xii} See Mt 14:20; 15:37; Mk 6:42; 8:8; Lk 9:17; Jn 6:12

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- ^{xiii} See Joachim Jeremias *'New Testament Theology'* SCM 1971; 114-116 and Norman Perrin *'Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus'* Harper and Row 1967; 104-107
- ^{xiv} Lk 7:34
- ^{xv} Mk 2:15-16; Lk 5:29-32
- ^{xvi} See Marcus Borg *'Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the teaching of Jesus'* Trinity Press 1984; 5-6, 39, 93-134
- ^{xvii} Geza Vermes *'Jesus the Jew'* Collins 1973; 224
- ^{xviii} See Mt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:7-23; Jn 13:1-18:1 (also 6:22-59). I am fully aware of the arguments that suggest this was not a Passover meal but rather a *Shabbat / Kiddush* meal, or a *Chaburah* meal where like-minded people ate together for a purpose (see W Barclay, *'The Lord's Supper'* SCM Press 1967; 20-34 for a simple statement of the different views), but I am unconvinced
- ^{xix} See Chaim Raphael, *'A Feast of History: the drama of Passover through the ages'* Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1972 - for an excellent presentation of the history, structure and meaning of the Passover meal
- ^{xx} Lk 24:13-35
- ^{xxi} Jn 21:1-14
- ^{xxii} See Acts 20:7
- ^{xxiii} *Shavuoth* celebrates God's gift of the *torah*, its name in Hebrew simply means 'weeks' following the instruction that it is for take place seven weeks from the time of the barley harvest at *Pesach* at the beginning of the wheat harvest – see Ex 34:22; Dt 16:10; 2Chron 8:13
- ^{xxiv} *Pentecost* is the Greek name for *Shavuoth* and means 'fiftieth', it is the fiftieth day after *Pesach* - see Lev 23:16
- ^{xxv} Acts 2:44-46 (adapted)
- ^{xxvi} See Lk 14:12; Jn 12:2 for *deipnon* as 'supper' (KJV), 1Cor 11:20 - 'Lord's supper'; 1Cor 10:21 - 'Lord's table'
- ^{xxvii} See Isa 25:6; Mt 8: 11; 22:4; Lk 14:15; 22:30; Rev 19:9. It also seems likely that the 'common meals' shared by the Essenes of the Qumran community were celebrated as an anticipation of the coming Messianic feast, see Geza Vermes *'The Dead Sea Scrolls in English'* Penguin Books 1968; 47
- ^{xxviii} See J Behm article *klao* in G Kittle (Ed) *'Theological Dictionary of the New Testament'* (Vol 3) 1965; 728-729
- ^{xxix} See Jude 12; 2Pt 2:13
- ^{xxx} 1Cor 11:17-22, 27-34
- ^{xxxi} I recognise that this is a strong statement, but I believe it to be true. Initially it is a meal that makes sure that the poor within the community are fed and then reaching out beyond that to wider society (more below). While there will of course be more intimate occasions of sharing, this fundamental truth must never be lost.
- ^{xxxii} See Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.1.10
- ^{xxxiii} See W Barclay, *'The Lord's Supper'* SCM Press 1967; 60. The *agape* was debated, fasting rather than feasting was encouraged; in 692 CE the Council of Trullan forbade the holding of an *agape* altogether
- ^{xxxiv} If the Peacemeal were genuinely seen to be the centrepiece of being a Jesus-community the whole way in which it expresses itself would have to change. To their credit the Orthodox and Roman Catholics place the Eucharist central but sadly as an exclusive ritual not an inclusive meal
- ^{xxxv} It originally had the sense of 'something set apart', then a 'pledge', or 'oath', then a 'promise', eventually a 'sign'. It was linked by early Christian thinkers to the idea of 'mystery'
- ^{xxxvi} This is the view held by the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and high Anglican churches
- ^{xxxvii} This is the view held by most Protestant churches (in one form or another) with the exception of the Quaker and Salvation Army communities who seeing it reduced to a mere ritual do not share the eucharist but seek to experience its truth spiritually
- ^{xxxviii} See CEB Cranfield article 'Thank' in A Richardson (Ed) *'A Theological Word Book of the Bible'* SCM Press 1957; 256 and J Behm article *klao* in G Kittle (Ed) *'Theological Dictionary of the New Testament'* (Vol 3) 1965; 736. Whatever secondary meanings we may find in the images of the bread and wine this is the primary one, especially when taken back to Jesus' original Aramaic words
- ^{xxxix} Jn 6:53
- ^{xl} In cannibalistic societies the main purpose of eating the other human being was to imbibe their qualities of strength and courage, for them to become part of you
- ^{xli} The 'society of friends' was the original name for the Quakers. For more on 'the kiss of peace' as a sign of wholeness or reconciliation in relationships, see 1Cor 16:20; 2Cor 13:12 et al. Interestingly, in Scandinavia mistletoe was a plant of peace, to kiss under it on entering a home was a sign that all relationships were right

and soldiers walking under a mistletoe were to drop their weapons and remain unarmed for a day; see Tess Ward, *'The Celtic Wheel of the Year: Celtic and Christian seasonal prayers'*, O Books 2007; 251-252 and http://www.goddessgift.com/Pandora's_Box/mistletoe.htm

^{xlii} For details of the Abraham story see Gen 18:1-15 also Heb 13:2

^{xliii} We discussed *epektasis* when reflecting on being a '*Radical Mystic*', based on Phil 3:13-14 Gregory of Nyssa said that the essence of perfection is never becoming perfect because there is always deeper and higher perfection to reach out towards. Becoming more and more like God, along with God.

^{xliv} 1Cor 11:26

^{xlv} Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3

^{xlvi} The only other place the word *epiousion* has been found was on a 1st Century CE papyrus shopping list discovered on an Egyptian rubbish dump by archaeologists. The list was 'the food for tomorrow', it is thought that early Christians may have used it with both a present sense of today and an eschatological sense about 'the age to come'

^{xlvii} The history of this table - 'breaking-bread', the 'eucharist' - in most Christian denominations, is one of exclusion rather than inclusion. All the high-sounding theological reasoning that attempts to justify this only illustrates how Jesus' teaching and example is either fundamentally misunderstood or simply disregarded

^{xlviii} Pr 9:5 see also Isa 55:1

^{xlix} Lk 14:17 see also Mt 11:28

ⁱ Mk 10:14

ⁱⁱ The arguments that children can not participate because of original sin and not yet having been baptised simply miss the point completely and is totally at odds with the attitude and example of Jesus

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted on July 29th 2011 on the 'Food Pantry' blog - <http://thefoodpantry.org>

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Lk 14:21,23 see also Mk 16:15

^{liv} See www.speak.org.uk

^{lv} Thanks to Rob Telford for this reflection

^{lvi} See <http://www.somewhere-else.org.uk>

^{lvii} See Barbara Glasson '*Mixed-up Blessing; a new encounter with being church*' Inspire 2006 and '*I Am Somewhere Else*' Darton, Longman and Todd 2006