

Spilled Bread

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Psalm 132:11-18

John 14:8-14

For a few minutes every month, we symbolically gather around a table. It's just a table, made of wood, made simply – nothing special to look at or admire. It could be in a hobby room – piled high with fabric, or scrapbook paper. It could be the catch-all table in the hall – keys, a plant that needs watering, a small clock, a picture of the kids.

But this table is particular. We call it the Lord's Table. And because we have given an ordinary, simple, wooden table a name, we come to believe it's special, sacred somehow. People are afraid to put things on it, afraid to lean on it, we don't want the children near it, one church I know refused to put the offering plates on it for fear some would mistake it for an altar. So when we attach words like special and sacred to the table, it stands to reason then that what we do there becomes special and sacred – and very serious.

I remember the first time I stood behind the Lord's Table, my voice wavered; my hands shook so badly that afterward, the congregation told me they worried that the grape juice would leap out of the cup and stain the paraments.

And then came that fateful day – when I went to break the homemade loaf of bread – only to find it was too big a loaf and my hands wouldn't go around it – couldn't get a real good grip on it. And then to find that it was still warm and the break didn't break, but began to pull apart and still doughy I held in mid air a stringy looking loaf that refused to come apart. And in that same church there was the time when I forgot to feed the elders and had to hold back my laughter and my embarrassed tears as they stood in the back of the sanctuary and pointed to their mouths – and did so in unison.

Once in WV I forgot the words in mid=sentence, and now here with you, I have again forgot the words of institution, and also forgot the thanksgiving prayer – thinking it was time to sing the final hymn – only for someone in the pews to correct me – out loud. The first time I served communion to the elders I called Betsy Vaunda and Vaunda Betsy. I am getting to the point where I worry if my brain and body will start to think of new ways to mess up this sacrament.

And then there was last Sunday at the Pace church. The napkin that covered the cubes of bread was somehow tucked into the basket and as I went to remove the napkin - well the bread cubes went flying. I was so hopeful that this streak of bad luck had

passed, but it was not to be. And I panicked. My face contorted in shock and horror. I saw there was enough left in the basket to feed the congregation, but somehow that bread on the table and the floor seems blasphemous – some kind of sin – something unholy – and I committed it. And so like a good housekeeper I started to scrape the bread off the table into the basket and pick up the bread on the floor and what? Better not put it back in the basket, but leave it on the floor or put it on the table. My attempt to clean up only made it worse. And I began to realize that I must look rather ridiculous in my robe bending over, down on the floor, my robed wings flapping in the breeze, in a futile attempt to make the table nice again and holy again. And then I heard it – laughter - my presiding over the table had devolved into a comedy act.

And as I contemplated – with great fear and trembling the thought of yet another Lord's Supper today, visions of spilled bread kept me awake a couple of nights. And then I remembered an article I read. Written by a Mennonite minister, her piece was entitled, "Holy Crumbs."

She talks about being happiest when the Lord's Supper ritual is over – something I can relate to these days. That time when church members stand in aisles talking and children rush to the now ordinary table to gobble up the remains of Christ's body in the bread. She enjoys watching the little fingers pulling hefty chunks of bread off the loaf or scraping the crumb of crust off the table. She calls the children's actions the devotion of desire as the children draw near to Christ – and wishes that the adults in the congregation would be as eager to receive the Lord.

As the children take the bread with them – out through the sanctuary doors she notices the trail of crumbs and imagines those holy crumbs following the children outside, eventually finding their way into the world. And then blown about, the crumbs recently blessed by pastor and Holy Spirit land in next-door yards where birds and squirrels join the holy feast.

After a while the church she served decided to bake the communion bread and tells of the times when the bottom of the bread was burned, or when yeast did not do its good rising work. The cookware used belongs to the church and while those pans are greased the bakers remember the many weddings and funerals; the potlucks, both the welcome and good-by gatherings. And the bread bakers were certain that those celebrations filled with love and tears and laughter were somehow baked into the bread they broke, blessed, and ate on Sunday morning.

I put the article down and somehow I was no longer upset about spilled bread. And as I sat there and let my thoughts conjure up images of this church's communion bread finding its way outside-- I smiled. Maybe we should all do more of that actually –

taking what we receive at the Lord's Table out into the world. Spilling Christ's love far beyond the table, the pews, and the doors of a building. Spilling it joyfully - like the children – everywhere we go, remembering to leave a trail of Christ behind us with every step we take. So that others will unknowingly partake of the holy meal – and be filled. never realizing they have joined generations of Christians at an ordinary table, never knowing they have been welcomed by and joined with Jesus.

Our Scripture passage has a lot to say today, but once again I am stuck on only a few of Jesus' comments. Have I been with you all this time, and you still do not know me? If you don't believe who I am, then believe in the things I have done – and know that you will do greater works than these.

Most of us probably question whether we can do greater works than Jesus. but perhaps through the holy crumbs we spill – others might come to discover that they are no longer hungry.