

# take this bread

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An Easter exploration – 2010  
Animated by Canon Jim Irvine

“We have two seasons at St. Gregory’s,”  
Rick had said to me – “Easter, and  
Easter’s coming.” p. 171

In the Gospel, a stranger was revealed as  
Jesus “in the breaking of the bread.” p.  
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I didn't understand how my own general beliefs – that the poor should be lifted up, prisoners freed, wars ended, and justice done – echoed biblical imperatives. *I was just excited to begin.* p. 11

**Isaiah 61:1** The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; **he has sent me** to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

I learned how central food is to creating human community, what eating together around a table can do. ... “There’s a hunger beyond food that’s expressed in food, and that’s why feeding is always a kind of miracle.” p. 23

Food remained something central to me, but I couldn't articulate why. ... I had no idea then that what I was hungry for was communion. p. 33

## **RECIPE 1 – MOLASSES OATMEAL BREAD**

### *Ingredients:*

1. 3 cups bread flour
2. 1 package of yeast
3. 1 cup warm water
4. ½ cup quick oats
5. ¼ cup molasses
6. 3 tablespoons of butter, softened
7. ½ teaspoon salt
8. 1 egg

### *Instructions:*

1. Incorporate wet *first*: water, molasses, butter, egg; dry *second*: flour, oats, salt.
2. Dent the flour and add the yeast.
3. Set Bread Machine on “Basic” and select 1.5 pound loaf option.
4. Once baked, coat the top with butter and let the bread machine bowl cool completely on a rack.

Good toasted.

What did I mean by prayer? I didn't mean asking an omnipotent being to do favors; the idea of "answered prayers" was untenable for me, since millions of people prayed fervently for things they never received. I didn't mean reciting a formula: I loved the language of some of the old prayers that were chanted at St. Gregory's, but I didn't think the words had magical power to change things. I didn't mean kneeling and looking pious, or trying to make a deal with God, or even praying "for" something. What was I telling him? p. 69

This is what it meant to be a Christian for me: that in the midst of undeniable suffering, it was possible to summon up gratitude and praise. "All of us go down to the dust," we sang, "yet even at the grave, we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia." p. 159

In that dark time, I was inching toward what religious traditions called "orthopraxy" (right practice) rather than orthodoxy (right belief). I was hearing that what counted wasn't fundamentalist theology, or liberation or traditional or postmodern theology. It wasn't denominations or creeds or rituals. It wasn't liberal or conservative ideology. It was faith, working through love. p. 161

*O God of abundance, you feed us every day.  
Rise in us now, make us into your bread,  
That we may share your gifts with a hungry world,  
And join in love with all people, through  
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

I'd started to talk about the religious imagery of being bread. "Like I would be Eucharist," I said excitedly, and Jeff interrupted. "Um, Sara, dear," he said, "what is this like for Martha and Katie when you talk like this? I mean ... that's a lovely prayer, but what's going on at home?" p. 163

## **RECIPE 2 – BASIC BREAD 1**

### *Ingredients:*

1. 3 cups bread flour
2. 1 cup whole grain flour, or whole wheat flour
3. 2 tbs oil
4. 2 tbs skim milk powder
5. 2 tsp salt
6. 2 tsp yeast
7. 2 cups warm water
8.  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup molasses, or honey, or sugar, or Splenda, or maple syrup

### *Instructions:*

1. Add all wet ingredients.
2. Then add all dry ingredients, adding the yeast last.
3. Set bread machine at 2 pound loaf.

“There’s a hunger beyond food that’s expressed in food,” he said promptly, “and that’s why feeding is always a kind of miracle. It speaks to a bigger desire.”

He crossed his legs and smiled at me.

“The feeding of the five thousand,” he said, “the miracle wasn’t that Jesus multiplied the loaves. It’s that the disciples took the bread and did what they were told, got up and started feeding, and something happened.” ...

“I consider myself as one of those people who’s got to do what Jesus said when he told the disciples, shut up, just go feed the people,” said the bishop. “You know, it’s a mystery. But sometimes you just have to trust and eat.” p. 175f.

“Both receiving and giving mean really opening ourselves to strangers – in whose bodies we find, and upon whose being depends, our own salvation.” p. 178

The more I read of Scripture, the more it began to occur to me that Jesus, if the stories had it right, was singularly uninterested in church. Everything I’d yearned for when I first tasted that bread was never going to be found neatly wrapped up inside the comfortable rituals of religion, the pretty spaces I’d come so quickly to associate with holiness, even my own routines at the pantry. I was going to have to hunt in what the Bible called “the rough places,” “the lonely places,” “the desert”; among people who’d been cast out, in some way or another, from the church. p. 179f.

Because God was about feeding and being fed, religion could be a way not to separate people but to unite them. p. 196

## RECIPE 3 – BASIC BREAD 2

### *Ingredients:*

1. ¼ cup lukewarm water (105F to 115F)
2. 2-¼ ounce packages active dry yeast
3. 1-¾ cup fat-free milk
4. 2-½ tablespoons sugar
5. 2 tablespoons acceptable vegetable oil
6. 4 cups all-purpose flour
7. 1 teaspoon salt
8. 2 cups all-purpose flour (plus more as needed)
9. Vegetable oil spray

### *Preparation:*

1. Pour the water into a large mixing bowl. Add the yeast. Stir to dissolve. Let stand for 5 minutes.
2. Stir the milk, sugar, and oil into the yeast mixture. Beat with a mixer or sturdy spoon for about 30 seconds, or until smooth.
3. Gradually add some of the remaining flour, beating after each addition, until the dough starts to pull away from the side of the bowl. Add more flour if necessary to make the dough stiff enough to handle.
4. Lightly flour a flat surface. Turn out the dough. Knead for 6 to 8 minutes, gradually adding enough of the remaining flour to make the dough smooth and elastic. (The dough shouldn't be dry or stick to the surface. You may not need all the flour, or you may need up to ½ cup more if the dough is too sticky).
5. Lightly spray a large bowl with vegetable oil spray. Turn the dough to coat all the sides. Cover the bowl with a damp dish towel. Let the dough rise in a warm, draft-free place (about 85F) for about 1 hour, or until doubled in bulk.
6. Punch down the dough. Divide in half. Shape into loaves. Lightly spray two 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pans with vegetable oil spray. Put the dough into the loaf pans. Cover each with a damp dish towel. Let the dough rise in a warm, draft-free place (about 85F) for about 30 minutes, or until doubled in bulk.
7. Preheat the oven to 425F.
8. Bake the loaves for 15 minutes. Reduce the heat to 375F. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the bread registers 190F on an instant-read thermometer or sounds hollow when rapped with knuckles. Turn the bread onto cooling racks. Let cool for 15 to 20 minutes before cutting.

In the Gospel, a stranger was revealed as Jesus “in the breaking of the bread.” p. 208

*This* is what gets left out, I was realizing: not just left out of the national political debate **but also left out of religious discourse**. Politicians talked about welfare—usually to blame and scapegoat—and occasionally made speeches about poverty. There was no shortage of talk about the poor and social service from church leaders of all stripes. But the experiences of people such as my volunteers, the texture and specificity of their incarnate lives, were missing from the story of what Christianity was like now in contemporary America.

And just as I'd looked for the unofficial truth, as a reporter, on the edges of things, I believed I was discovering, at the food pantry, our people's significance to the real story. They were on the margins of society, and often on the margins of the church, but their lives were full of meaning. They threw light not only on the overlooked parts but on how the whole system worked. These poor lives illuminated middle-class life—our anxiety, our reliance on managing and fixing feelings rather than having them, our desire to punish. They made clear the limitations of religions that cast out every member whose reality didn't fit inside church doctrines. Their lives showed the profound resourcefulness and strengths of the weak. The thing that astonished me sometimes—listening to tales of terrible damage, psychosis, loss—was not how messed up people could be but how resilient; how, in the depths of suffering, they found ways to adapt and continue.

But in breaking bread with my people, and hearing their stories, I was learning about more than politics or religion. I was learning something about God: You can't hope to see God without opening yourself to *all* God's creation. p. 216

This was a different way to learn theology: not the solitary reading I'd stumbled through, not the instruction I'd

received through sermons. There in the kitchen was the physicality at the heart of the story of Jesus. Listening and sauteing, talking and tasting, feeding friends and eating together: It was a stew of words and acts and food.

And through it, I could sometimes grasp the backward, upside-down reality I'd sensed at Christianity's core: the frightening promise that, as the prayer said, echoing Mary's words, "Things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which have grown old are being made new."

This was where I found my faith: a faith expressed in the wild conceit that a helpless, low-caste baby could be God. That ugly, contaminated, and unimportant people embodied holiness. That my own neediness and misfitting, not my goodness or piety, were what God intended to use.

And here, at the pantry, just like Mercedes, like Paul, like Lauren, I was finding a message from God. It said the hunger that had drawn us here was so that we could see what the kingdom of heaven looked like.

Some Christians thought the kingdom was about an afterlife, but I believed it was *this* world, just as my parents had, in their secular way, insisted so long ago. The kingdom was the same old earth, populated by the same clueless humans, transformed wherever you could glimpse God shining through it.

Some thought it was about judgment, but I believed that in the kingdom, there was no separation of sinners from saved, righteous from damned. The pantry looked like the kingdom to me precisely because we were all thrown in together—a makeshift community so much bigger and more contradictory than any of us would have chosen. But each of us had come just as we were to this Table, drawn, without planning, to the shores of some lake where we'd heard miracles might happen. And we found the kind of abundance described in parables: food for five thousand, money multiplying like manna; oil pouring out profligately and the lamps burning wildly all night long, blazing through the darkness of our lives. p. 222f.

## **RECIPE 4 – PUMPERNICKEL BREAD**

Preparation Time: 15 minutes, Cook Time: 40 minutes

### *Ingredients:*

1. 1 1/8 to 1 1/4 cups water
2. 1 1/2 Tbsp. oil
3. 1/3 cup molasses
4. 1 1/2 tsp. salt
5. 1 1/2 cups bread flour
6. 1 cup medium rye flour
7. 1 cup whole wheat flour
8. 3 Tbsp. wheat gluten
9. 3 Tbsp. cocoa powder
10. 1 Tbsp. caraway seeds
11. 2 tsp. active dry yeast

### *Preparation:*

1. Place all ingredients in bread pan, using the smallest amount of liquid in the recipe.
2. Select Medium Crust setting and Whole Wheat Cycle and press Start. Observe the dough as it kneads.
3. If after 5-10 minutes it appears dry or if your machine sounds as if it's straining, add more liquid 1 tbsp. at a time until the dough is smooth, soft, and slightly tacky to the touch.
4. After the baking cycle ends, cool bread on wire rack for 1 hour before slicing.
5. Makes 1 1/2 lb. loaf.

Lawrence, who'd been there at the beginning of the food pantry, was gentle as he addressed her fears. "I'm like other middle-class people," he said, "and I hate being forced to deal with people who are not like me—people who are poor, crazy, who don't behave the way I do in public. They make me nervous. I feel a sense of conflict about this because, on the one hand, I know what the right thing to do is, yet I'm sometimes paralyzed when I try to do it. By the right thing, I mean opening myself to the experience of people who are not like me.

"But," Lawrence continued, his restaurant background showing, "I really want to serve food to the community. I want people who are too tired from a week of work and child rearing and the stress of living in the projects to take their family to lunch without having to cook and do the dishes. And after that, I want them to take a bag of groceries home—so their kids have something decent to eat in the morning before school. I don't care if they ever join our church or not. I don't care if they worship with the Holy Rollers. I don't care if they are against gay marriage. I don't care what they think of me. I just want them to have a little break to feel my love in what I sometimes think is the best, if not the only, way I know how to show it, with love in my heart and the smell of garlic on my hands. *That's* what the kingdom of God looks like to me." p. 252f.

We were talking past each other. I knew what they thought: Christians were corny, sentimental, vulgar, embarrassing, intolerant, superstitious, dogmatic, self-righteous, doggy, obtuse, smug, unsophisticated, and dumb. They thought I wasn't like that, so I couldn't be a "real" Christian. But I *was* like that. I wasn't more enlightened or less enamored of my own piety or purer. Christianity, if it was all I'd come to believe, demanded that I understand exactly how like everyone else I was. And it was this realization that would not go away, even as I battled with the costs of faith. p. 262

## **RECIPE 5 – CORNBREAD MUFFINS**

### *Ingredients:*

1. 1 cup all-purpose flour
2. 1 cup cornmeal
3. 1 teaspoon salt
4. 4 teaspoons baking powder
5. 1/3 cup white sugar
6. 1 egg
7. 1¼ cups milk
8. 50 g vegetable shortening

### *Directions:*

1. Combine ingredients in a large bowl, then mix using a hand beater (no longer than 1 minute)
2. Pour into 12 large muffin cups.
3. Bake for 15-20 minutes at 350F.

# take this bread

*Brothers and sisters* in Christ,  
God calls us to faithful service  
by the proclamation of the word,  
and sustains us with the sacrament  
of the body and blood of Christ.  
[*Hear now God's word,*  
*and*] receive this holy food from the  
Lord's table.

Most merciful God,  
**we confess that we have sinned against  
you  
in thought, word, and deed, by what we  
have done, and by what we have left  
undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole  
heart;  
we have not loved our neighbours as  
ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly  
repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us, that  
we may delight in your will, and walk  
in your ways,  
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

*The priest shall say...*  
Almighty God have mercy upon you,

pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all  
goodness, and keep you in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

*Before Communion...*

As our Saviour taught us, let us pray,

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.**

The gifts of God for the People of God.  
**Thanks be to God.**

*After Communion...*

Glory to God,  
whose power, working in us,  
can do infinitely more  
than we can ask or imagine.  
Glory to God from generation to  
generation, in the Church and in Christ  
Jesus,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

*Dismissal...*

Let us bless the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**