

Embedded Christianity

John 6:51-58

"...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

In preparing communion litanies I have always marveled at the wisdom of Jesus - taking common elements like bread and wine, blessing them and giving them as a remembrance to his disciples. So much of life and poetry is about metaphor. Like a drum, metaphor is not just that first hit on the drumhead, but the real sound, the real meaning comes in the reverberations afterward.

Metaphor is about resonance. And the bread and the wine resonate with meaning. The broken bread, the broken body - breaking bread meaning sharing a meal together as the most common and sacred of human interactions. The bread only being shared if it is broken into pieces - a piece to each in order to keep the community whole. A common loaf - an uncommon promise.

If I had been Jesus, I know I would have screwed it up. This was the last supper and I would have wanted something special - something that would set this moment apart. So I might have gone out and gotten some exotic food - like a kiwi - cut it up and given a small special piece to each disciple. And I probably would have mixed a special never-before-drunken punch - and then given the secret ingredients to Peter to be kept in the holy of holies and passed down to the priests and sacred leaders forever and ever.

I would have wanted them to feel set apart - special - chosen and so would have had food to make my point. If I had been Jesus, I can just see it now - a whole worldwide enterprise selling the Christian equivalent to a Kosher kiwi might have arisen.

But bread, simple, common everyday bread harked back to the story that every Jew knew by heart - the manna in the wilderness - the bread that saved their ancestors lives. But this was new and better manna - the kind that would really save their lives. And that's where metaphor comes

in, the resonance and reverberations that are created, giving new meaning to an old idea.

The temptation with Jesus is to make him more divine, more God than human. Which means we forget that God's only son was embedded into this world, sharing the table with and the journey of the most vulnerable. And he came to challenge the Purity Codes - all those theological and political rules that made the high priests better than the multitudes.

Which leads to the modern-day fundamentalist perversion of Christianity. Fundamentalism is really Kiwi Christianity. The emphasis is all on individual salvation - setting yourself apart, special - like a kiwi - not embedded within the world, like bread.

Fundamentalism - rigid, righteous, purist, authoritarian, male-dominated - sees the world in absolute black and white terms - and their goal of life more and more is to be raptured up to heaven. In fact, the more hellish the world becomes, the better - the sooner will come the rapture.

That is the faith of a kiwi - exotic, other worldly, individualistic, special, city-on-a-hill mentality. The kiwi Christians only let in the pure, the saved, the believers. No openness to new information or revelation - it has all been said and said literally.

So why am I taking so much time to explain this fundamentalism? Because it also explains our political plight right now. This nation is in the grips of a political and religious fundamentalism that is a rigid, chosen nation, holier-than-thou mentality. Fundamentalists believe that the United States of America is the righteous remnant, so being righteous whatever we do is therefore right.

Bill Moyers says the delusional is no longer marginal. It has come in from the fringe, to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington. Theocracy - just like in Jesus' day now rules.

A 55% majority of Americans believe in "the Rapture," that before the world ends the religiously faithful will be saved and taken to Heaven; and (36%) say the Bible's book

of Revelation is a "true prophesy" that predicts the end of the world as it will happen. True believers will be lifted out of their clothes and transported to heaven, where, seated next to the right hand of God, they will watch their political and religious opponents suffer plagues of boils, sores, locusts and frogs.

Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* writes, "Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself...**The force possessed by totalitarianism lies in its ability to shut the masses off from the real world.**" Think Fox News, think our mass media, think a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Now I want to say that these are decent, generous, even kind people - but that does not make them less delusional or less dangerous when they have their hand on the trigger of nuclear winter.

...the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The humanity of Jesus, his flesh, is given over for the LIFE of the world - not its apocalyptic death. The humanity of Jesus, his flesh was given for the life of the WORLD - not some other-worldly rapture, not some end of time Armageddon - but for this very world.

Kiwi Christianity is really a form of Puritanism - that austere, patriarchal, rigid, humorless brand of Christianity that believed they were the chosen people and anyone or anything that got in their way could and should be cut down. Which explains the genocide of the native population, the deforestation of the seaboard, the erosion of the topsoil and the extinction of more species of animals than we care to recollect. Every victory over the native population proved that God was on their Puritan side. Kiwi Christianity is a religion of dominion over.

In 1636 the Puritans massacred a village of women and children and ended up wiping out the whole Pequot nation. Immediately after the massacre Connecticut sent thirty men to

*maintain our right that God by
Conquest hath given to us.*

The Puritans interpreted the victory as God's sign that this land that they called the New Canaan was theirs. Two generations later Puritan scion Cotton Mather wrote of that day:

*...in a little more than one hour,
five or six hundred of these barbarians
were dismissed from a world that was
burdened with them.*

George Bush and his allies have criticized us who are "reality-based." They say that while we are trying to understand reality they have moved on and created their own new reality, which we try to catch up with and understand. And when that reality is not what they want, they simply say whatever they want - they lie and lie again until a certain percentage of the population takes it as truth. So Dick Cheney months ago can say that the Iraq insurgency is on its last throes. Just this last week the Iraqi leaders said it was the deadliest month for Iraqis since the war began and the White House said the violence has decreased slightly.

Christianity of the Bread is embedded Christianity - of and for the most vulnerable people. It is a faith not set apart, not an exclusive club for believers, but a faith AMONG the people - among the tax collectors and sinners, the beggars and lepers and maimed - a faith AMONG the outcast and the downcast, the marginalized and poor. I wish I had a dollar for every time the Hebrew and Greek testaments talk about widows and orphans - the classic archetype for the most vulnerable of generation after generation throughout history. And always the injunction is to help them, side with them, advocate for them and defend them.

Gandhi once said that there are people so poor that God could only come to them as a loaf of bread. Can you imagine someone saying that about a kiwi. And yet there is a "Let them eat cake" mentality about kiwi Christianity. For what is important is not what the poor eat, but what they believe.

I know that some of us are not too enamored with the UCC tagline - "God is still speaking." And I have to admit that at first blush it did not turn me on either. But in reality

it is the perfect counterpoint to the right-wing fundamentalist "Kiwi Christianity." For that brand of Christianity says: "God has spoken - once and for all and forever." Our job is to listen to the televangelists, literally interpret the scriptures and obey that Word.

"God is still speaking" means that revelation continues and we can all be a part of that if we have the ears to hear. God is not still speaking to a chosen few - the Pope, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell - God is speaking to us all.

So we are Christians of the Bread - the Living Bread. We are embedded Christians - embedded in the world, embedded in reality. Kiwi Christians live in an imaginary and now too often delusional world.

So we see why evolution or science is a threat to this imaginary consistent world that is needed to enlist obedient people into the armies of darkness and lay the groundwork for a totalitarian regime. A simplistic world of good and evil, a world totally fitting into the apocalyptic vision of the Bible - becomes the imaginary world that explains 9/11 and other cataclysms. Even today a large percentage of people still believe that Iraqis were on the planes that hit the World Trade Center. And if you believe that then the war in Iraq makes consistent sense.

The conjured enemies of the imaginary world become more real than the violent, dismembering, brutal and dehumanizing facts of the real world.

But I offer a word of caution for we Christians of the Bread. We too can become rigid, hard - like stale bread. And stale bread cannot be easily broken, shared and eaten. We have to guard against our own self-righteousness - for God is still speaking and we have to listen.

Embedded in this bread is Jesus, the Son of all Humanity. As Jesus said: **"...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."**

This bread is for the LIFE of the world, not its death or apocalypse. Jesus died so that we might live more fully, more humanly.

Just as the yeast is embedded in this bread to make it rise up - so too we as Christians are embedded in the real world in order to make it rise up in love and justice for the most vulnerable.

This bread is the most common of sustenance, it is the manna in the wilderness, the form God takes to the poor, the daily bread that we pray for each Sunday, the most basic element of human life and of our faith.

This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat in remembrance of me, in remembrance of my life among the most vulnerable and my death at the hands of the civil and religious leaders who were threatened by my refusal to worship their purity.

Take and eat, like Jesus embedded himself into this world, embed yourselves in the real world so that one day we might rise up, not in rapture, but in a revolution of the spirit that will indeed liberate us all.

Michael McConnell
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