

Breaking Bread



Bible Study: The Breaking of Bread

19 And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

Matthew 14:19

36 Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.

Matthew 15:36

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

Matthew 26:26



In these passages it is always Jesus who gives thanks or blesses the bread, then breaks and shares it. It seems an action characteristic of him. Does that shed light on the phrase in Luke 24:35?

Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.
(Luke 24:35)

Remember Jesus is recognised by this action, as if it is something special to him, not just the blessing any Jew would offer before a meal.

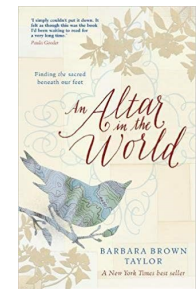
In the 'feeding-of-the-multitude' stories it appears that everyone is included – food is showered on people in abundance; whereas in the Last Supper narratives Jesus shares just with his intimate group of disciples. The feeding-stories implicitly (explicitly in John 6) associate what happened with God's gift of manna in the desert at the time of Israel's Exodus from Egypt; whereas the Last Supper narratives suggest that these actions are to do with Jesus' body soon to be broken on the cross. What difference do you think that makes? Is breaking bread a sign of the kingdom, or is it a memorial of Christ's death?

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke associate the Last Supper with Passover. In John's Gospel the association with Passover is made in a different way: Jesus dies when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple in preparation for the Passover meal (John 18.28; 19.14), and a scriptural text about the Passover lamb is applied to Jesus' dead body – 'not one of his bones shall be broken' (John 19.36; cf. Exodus. 12.46; Numbers. 9.11). Paul wrote 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed (I Corinthians. 5.7). So the breaking of the bread points to the story about Israel being freed from slavery in Egypt as a model for understanding how Christ dies to free humankind from the tyranny of sin and death.

Non-Fiction Books

• An Altar in the World

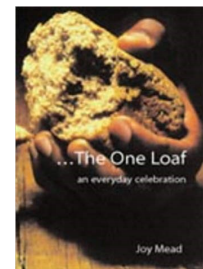
Barbara Brown Taylor



In this highly acclaimed and lyrical modern classic, bestselling author Barbara Brown Taylor reveals the countless ways we can discover divine depths in the small things we do and see every day.

• The One Loaf

Joy Mead



A book which explores the making and the mystery of bread: growing, making, baking, sharing in story and recipe, poetry and prayer. In bread we see the true connectedness of all life - the uniting of body and soul, spirit and material. It is not just a symbol of life, it is life itself. Without food, life is impossible, so eating becomes sacred. Take and eat means take and live; to share food is to share our life. Jesus, in a simple act, made eating and sharing sacred.

Questions to Consider

1. Although it is really hard to put into words, can you say why Communion is a Holy Habit for you?
2. How often do you share the sacrament of Holy Communion; is this about right for your community?
3. What might the significance be that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in a domestic setting and that the Acts 2 community broke bread in their homes?
4. How important is it that Methodism offers an open table at Communion? And what does this mean for you in practice?

A note from Eric

Across the world, and through the centuries, Christians have gathered to break bread. That act of devotion is called by a variety of names including Holy Communion, Eucharist, Mass, the Lord's Supper. The heart of this is what Jesus pointed to when he broke bread with the disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, just hours before he was arrested, tried, tortured and crucified, He said,



‘This is my body broken for you’.

Recalling these words reminds us that, whoever we are, we are all welcome as guests around God's table. In response, we are called to reach out to others in the same way.

For Personal Reflection from Andrew Roberts

Ponder the question of why have we made something Jesus deliberately made so simple and transferable so complicated.

In what ways could the breaking of bread be a holy habit for you in your everyday life?

With whom could you share a simple act of breaking bread? Your family? A housebound neighbour perhaps? Or the person at work who always seems to eat their lunch or their own. Let the sacred be present in the everyday.