

**Year B\* Lent 4\* 3/26/06\* St. Mary of the Hills\*  
Blowing Rock Rick Lawler\* "Back of the Bread"\***

Bread has been on my mind lately. Eleven of our young people are traveling through Lent preparing to celebrate their first communion or their early communion this Easter. Last Wednesday we learned this blessing for bread.

Back of the bread is the flour. Back of the flour is the mill.

Back of the mill is the 'wind and the rain and the Father's will.

We blessed the bread and baked it for our Eucharist today.

Lent is a journey. A spiritually difficult journey if we take it seriously, and we do.

We need spiritual sustenance to make a difficult journey. Today the church wants to remind us that there is sustenance for the journey. Bread. The bread Jesus feeds us.

We're just over half through our Lenten journey. We began 25 days ago on Ash Wednesday when we were reminded that we are sinners, that we are going to die some day, and that to properly prepare for the Lord's passion we must fast, study, and deny ourselves. Adults did this children did this on Ash Wednesday.

The First Sunday of Lent we were whisked out into the desert with Jesus, not to enjoy 18 holes in a dry heat, but, with Jesus, to confront the devil right where we are tempted.

The Second Sunday of Lent we were told our journey means a cross for ourselves. To follow Jesus is to find we have a cross of our own to take up.

Then on the Third Sunday of Lent we learned that Jesus' passion for justice and compassion means we must be willing to challenge religious, political, and economic systems that deviate from God's will.

Lent is no walk in the park. The themes and realities we are asked to face or embrace are the hardest things in life. So good work.

Today is a sort of Oasis in the journey. Today we are given a Jesus who feeds us. One author I'm reading this Lent said, "The sharing of bread is intimately entangled with the ministry of Jesus. It is the great sign and metaphor of the kingdom. I have a friend who says if you can read the gospels without getting hungry then you're not paying attention. The ministry of Jesus reads like a gigantic floating potluck.

From the opening wedding feast to the feeding of the multitudes, by way of the banquet parables or eating with the tax-collectors and sinners, through the last supper and the

resurrection meals, Jesus can be seen with bread in his hands - blessing, breaking, offering, partaking." (Bill Wylie Kellermann, Seasons of Faith and Conscience)

So our Lenten work is not only to be deeply challenged but to be deeply nourished. To allow Jesus to feed us as he fed the multitudes.

And if you are not hungry for bread, or like me, you're trying to cut down on wheat, what are you hungry for?

Mercy.  
Humor.  
Lightness.  
Joy.

Relaxing.

What do you need from Jesus at this halfway point of our journey?

We know he has plenty of challenge for us. But do we know that he really does love us and wants us to be happy? Do we know that Jesus understands we need rest? We need nourishment. We need feeding.

The bread Jesus feeds us nourishes us physically and the importance of that is only forgotten when we have plenty of bread. We know through our outreach and mission work there are those in the world who do not have enough bread. Part of what we must rest from is our continuing and necessary work of reaching out to others in Watauga County, Panama, Washington, D.C., with physical and financial resources.

The Jesus bread feeds us with connection.

Back of the bread is the flour. Back of the flour is the mill.

Our Jesus bread connects us to flour, and mills, and farmers, and truckers, and grocery store clerks, and bakers. We remember that we cannot even eat a simple piece of bread without the help and co-operation of hundreds of men and women.

Back of the mill is the wind and the rain.

The Jesus bread connects us to creation; the precious, life-giving, resources of water, land, and air. We are literally made up of the elements of God's creation. Through the Jesus bread we realize our utter dependence upon God's good earth every Sunday morning.

Back of the wind and the rain is the Father's will.

Through are connectedness to one another, through our dependence upon the good earth, we are connected to the mystery of all life and love and providence which we call God. The providence of God, the providing of God, is a joy and an enjoyment to lose ourselves in every Sunday morning.

The bread of the Eucharist connects us with Jesus, our brother, our Savior, our God in human form. "On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Our Holy Communion given and received every Sunday morning unfailingly connects us to Jesus at whatever depth we are ready and willing to be connected to him. This connection nourishes the deep needs of our souls. This connection saves us from sin and death. This connection fills us with joy and celebration.

And the bread of Jesus connects to one another. As St. Augustine said to his congregation, "You are the bread on the altar." The bread on the altar is the presence of Jesus but it also your presence. This connection is as vital as the rest. We need this connection especially when we live in divided, contentious, times like these. We're so different.

We're men and women.

We're old and young.

We're conservative and liberal.

We have different temperaments, different strengths and weaknesses, different values and visions. It's a wonder we can function together at all sometimes. But function we do.

We praise God together.

We follow Jesus together.

We serve the world together.

We teach our children together.

As Episcopalians it is the bread of Jesus which calls us together, brings us to our knees, humbles us, feeds us, every time.

Every Sunday morning all our differences are transcended. All our disagreements are held a little less tightly.

We celebrate that what unites us is greater than what divides us. We are all human beings on a lenten journey.

All needing to be feed.

All looking to Jesus.

All worshipping God.

All open to the Spirit.

The bread of Jesus accomplishes this miracle of connection every time, every Sunday, completely, unfailingly.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11)  
It's time to rest for a while in Jesus' love, in Jesus' providing, in Jesus' power to connect us, in Jesus bread.

Back of the bread is the flour. Back of the flour is the mill.  
Back of the mill is the wind and the rain and the Father's will.