

Bread and Chocolate

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

Maybe you've seen the poster: "When life asks, chocolate answers." Chocolate has enough worshippers, it could be a religion. Its theology is seductive. "Chocolate is always there for you when you don't have a shoulder to cry on." Its faith is absolute: "Chocolate is not a matter of life and death, it's more important than that." Its followers worship chocolate with cultish devotion: "There's no chocolate anonymous because no one wants to quit." It's cool to be a chocoholic.

Not surprisingly, chocolate sales jumped by 12 %, during the pandemic last year to 27 billion dollars.

Chocolate lovers have tee shirts, totes, mugs, posters, bumper stickers, websites and romance. Trust me, no one wants a loaf of bread for Valentine's Day.

How can Jesus, the bread of life, compete? Handcrafted, by God, in a decidedly small batch. Definitely artisanal. And it comes with the promise that whomever eats from it will live forever. Chocolate might make you want to *live* forever, but, we all know the sugar highs of this world never last. Jesus is offering us so much more than food. Sustenance, in the deepest sense of the word. Meaning, belonging, if we only we "taste, eat."

Theologian and Episcopal priest, Lauren Winner writes: "In calling himself 'the bread of life,' — and not, say, crème caramel or caviar — Jesus is identifying with basic food, with sustenance, with the food that, for centuries afterward, would figure in the protest efforts of poor and marginalized people. No one holds caviar riots; people riot for bread. So to speak of God as bread is to speak of God's most elemental provision for us."

My daughter was on to something when once, while kneeling at the communion rail, ate an especially crispy wafer and turned to me and whispered, "I think he was sunburned."

Yet most of us are more comfortable with the cerebral Jesus that feeds are heads rather than the sensual—that feeds are heart. I realize this when I've worshipped in poor churches in the deep South. Despite the more effusive style of worship, I'm always reminded of the words, "When Jesus is all you have, Jesus is all you need." Comfort and privilege make it easier to keep Jesus at arm's length and we suffer for it.

Jesus wants to be so much more than a creed, a good example, or a teacher in our lives, writes Debie Thomas in this week's "Journey with Jesus." He wants to be food. He *is* food. Are we hungry for him? Will we allow his substance to become ours? The bread of heaven is ours for the tasting."

The bread of heaven can be a matter of life and death when it's poisoned by those who use it for hatred and violence. I had not realized until this week during the testimony of the heroic Capitol Hill police officers who defended the Capitol on January 6th how extensively religion was used to fuel and justify the mob's incendiary rage.

"It was clear the terrorists perceive themselves to be Christians," said Officer Daniel Hodges. "I saw the Christian flag directly to my front," said Hodges.

Anthea Butler, a University of Pennsylvania professor of the history of religion and author of *White Evangelical Racism*, said, "The insurrectionists played out what American history has been for white supremacists—Christian nationalism steeped in racism from slavery to the present...the Capitol police officers showed us there's a straight line from the Confederacy to the January 6th insurrection."

In video [captured by The New Yorker](#), one of the insurrectionists perched atop the Senate dais paused to shout "Jesus Christ, we invoke your name!"

This is what happens when the bread of heaven is poisoned. People die. 5 were killed during the insurrections, 140 were injured, and two police officers have committed suicide in the wake of the riot. "Not everyone wore a Guns and God hoodie or carried a Jesus flag," tweeted Peter Manseau, the National Museum of American History's curator of American religious history. "But they all shared the psychological safety net such symbols provided. "How," he asked rhetorically, "can a righteous mob be wrong?"

The righteous mob that answered Pilates question with "Crucify him, crucify him," had no doubt.

Jesus knew then, if he hadn't before, that the bread of heaven was going to be a tough sell.

Yet it was his final gift to his disciples at the Last Supper. Take eat, this is my body, it is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Now it's up to us to decide what we will do with our lives in remembrance of him.

The Eucharist, which we will soon celebrate, is a very good place to start. Take the bread and ask God to let his will become yours. Pray it week after week. Year after year. Change will surely happen to you as it did for me. It was the prayer I prayed when I was looking for a way make the last years of my working life somehow be in service to God from my deep sense of gratitude for the life I had lived.

Take the bread which is given for you. Feed on him with faith and thanksgiving.

In the words of Debie Thomas, “May we absorb it. May we share it. May we desire it above all things. May its nourishment permeate us through and through until we, like Jesus, become life-saving bread for the whole world.”

AMEN