

“It Is What It Is”

August 8, 2021

John 6:35,41-51

BREAD

Very brief History

The Taster Bread Man. Hostess twinkies and cupcakes, all manner of goodies Of course, bread and “Hollywood Bread”

The French Baguette with its Crunchy crust and chewy inside in my favorite now. In addition to the crusty and chewiness, I like Baguette because it is at its best when eaten once it is torn or, heaven forbid, sliced. It dries out far too quickly.

According to the “historyofbread.com”

According to archeological evidence, Bread has been a staple food for over 30,000 years. Since at least 10,000 years ago when wheat and barley were some of the first plants to be domesticated in the so-called “Fertile Crescent” region of Mesopotamia and near Nile. Other parts of the world independently domesticated other cereals such as rice in East Asia, maize in the Americas and sorghum in sub-Saharan Africa. It all began grinding grains, adding water and if you were wealthy, some salt.

Try finding a specific type of bread in the long commercial bread aisle at our local Kings Sooper or Safeway. Add to this Artisan, special grain and gluten free bread, etc.

It is no wonder that the Hebrew and Greek words for bread appear over 400 times in the Hebrew and New Testament. The Four Gospels use the two Greek words (psomi and artos) for bread 70 times. Of course, the term bread is often used literally, but it is used metaphorically by Jesus; as in the scripture reading this morning. “I am the Bread of Life.

The basic ingredient for bread is Gluten and gluten free grain.

A warning I am shifting gears here...

As bread needs grains to be bread, so we, the United Church of Christ Parker Hilltop needs our WHY to be UCCPH.

OUR WHY Statement. A bit of history . . .

A few years ago, moderator Paul Campbell, the Council, and Pastor Tracey created the long-range vision and planning team.

If I remember correctly the members were Brooke Albright, Gus Burkard, Brian and Ashley Fahey, Karen Graham, Harv Harvey, Holly Jay, Denise Mann, Joe Narracci, Pastor Tracey and me. It was during our long-range planning meetings that the Council sent Moderator Paul Campbell, Denise Mann and me to a conference in San Antonio given the UCC. The three of us received a powerful God Shot when the speaker said "Your planning must grow out of your reason for being a church your WHY statement. We looked at each other "the church needs a WHY before we can move ahead." After much thought, wordsmithing, input from the congregation and prayer, the WHY Statement created and adopted by the congregation. The team explored the WHY statement with the Council, and ministry teams of the church.

Fast forward February 2020 and COVID. It was clear that a priority for the church was a new team to plan for the immediate and near-term future. The Strategic Planning team was formed in part as WHY team members: Gus Burkard, Brian Fahey, and Karen Graham moved from the WHY Team to the new Strategic planning team. The WHY Team now consisting of Brooke Albright, Harv Harvey, Denise Mann and I became dormant.

During this our time in the COVID Wilderness hearing and thinking about our WHY I have pondered how to apply it to my life and the life of UCCPH. After all, it is full of mind and heart boggling words.

I am not going to go through our WHY word for word. It would take far too much time. Additionally, and more importantly, it needs to be nuanced again as we move into this transition time.

I am going to ponder aloud about that two-word phrase which we have heard a lot over these past years even preceding it becoming the hinge pin of our WHY.

The phrase "Unconditional Love."

Unconditional means absolute, complete without exception.

My favorite New Testament passage is from the eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans speaks about Unconditional

I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. Romans 8:38-39 MSG

In his book, "Gratefulness the Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness" Benedictine Br. David Steindell-Rast speaks about Love:

"When we ask for characteristics of love applicable to each and all of its forms, we find at least two: a sense of belonging and a wholehearted acceptance of that belonging with all of its implications. These two characteristics are typical of every kind of love."

He continues:

Love is a wholehearted yes to belonging.

Preparing for this sermon it occurred to me that our church motto "Come as you are for you are enough" is the great definition of Unconditional Love. The message is you belong. It is an invitation to belong. The question of choice is "How do I belong?" What choices have I made; will I make accepting this invitation? Now, it goes without saying that at times we have struggled with its application.

"What about this situation? What about this person."

It can be no other way, for all that we do, say, think, believe, and trust is conditioned, that is, limited by our individuality and OUR HUMANITY. But that does not mean we are stuck! We can choose to remind ourselves and others that we and all of creation that we are loved - that we belong!

Can we hear God speaking? Can we hear God speaking to those who are not like us?

Some of you know that my brother and I check in with each other every Saturday morning via Zoom. 10 to 20 minutes depending on the past week. These days the conversation moves to his health. My brother's response is: "It is, what it is."

Now some take this as a resignation. "Oh well!" But not for my brother. It is a statement of acceptance which enables him to move forward! If only from one moment to the next. "It is what it is!" Based upon that I and my family will make my choices.

You and I know that our responses to the happiest, most fulfilling, the hardest heart-wrenching as well as the everyday experiences rest with, in and through our choices. In large part our lives are conditioned, that is limited, by our choices, and the choices of others. Paul reminds of all the condition of our lives.

What about the bread Ardie asked last night after hearing this homily? Indeed. Some of us will remember when we first served communion as the United Church of Christ Parker Hilltop. We served leavened bread and juice. The Deacons came forward and received the plates with bread and the trays with juice. One Sunday after giving the plates and trays to the Deacons, Pastor brought forth a small plate "We have gluten free bread as well." A simple choice. The Bread of life given for you."

You are loved and, in that love, you are accepted and you belong.

The WHY Statement Slide

Let us read our WHY together, you may unmute if you wish

As always, it is a bit chaotic. Some might say, discordant, others affirm the diversity. But there can be no mistaking it. In that moment each of us conditions our belonging as only we can. We each conditioned UCCPH WHY with our own voices. our own lived experiences in the moment.

"It is what it is" Amen