

*Sweet Bread*

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Psalm 127:1-2

Have you ever made your own bread? It's been a few years since we have, but it's something I enjoy doing. I particularly love making olive bread and working the olives right into it or a challah bread that you roll out and braid. It's especially fun for kids to watch the dough rise. We used to set our dough right by the heater to help it out a little in the winter.

But how about on the opposite end of the spectrum from freshly baked bread? Does this look familiar to you? (The ends of the loaf in a scraggly plastic bag.) Sometimes we end up with a drawer full of these in the refrigerator, and no one wants to eat them!

Our scripture this morning says, "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for God gives sleep to his beloved."

For me, the plastic bag with a couple of scraps in it, is the perfect symbol for "the bread of anxious toil." This phrase, "eating the bread of anxious toil," speaks about our spiritual nourishment, or our lack of it, when we have become the hamster running on the wheel or the duck on the pond with the fiercely pedaling feet; when we have gotten ourselves into a rhythm of not-stopping, into a pattern of thinking that the rightness of the world depends upon our efforts.

Eating the bread of anxious toil happens when we have exchanged our "being" – our being a person – for "doing," when we have started to place our identity and our value into what we "get done" instead of who we are.

For those of us who are "do-ers," it might be hard at first to hear what this psalm is saying – that our staying up that extra hour, our dragging ourselves up before dawn, is in vain! We might ask, "Doesn't it matter? Aren't we holding everything and everyone together?" But behind this scripture is God's love trying to set us free. Trying to remind us that God's joy is meant for us, too.

Let me ask you, if you stopped running so hard, for a little while, and let yourself "be," would the sky fall down? Or would you, instead, after reconnecting with the Source of Your Life, after eating the Bread That Satisfies, be better able to approach what is before you, with a clear heart and clear mind? And might we, if we set down our load for just a little while, give someone else the chance to pick something up for us?

Perhaps, even, when we came back to that pile of waiting tasks, we could see which ones weren't worth picking up again!

This psalm is a message of love and trust: you are God's beloved, and God offers you rest. But to accept it, we have to trust God (and other people) to "hold down the fort." Is this as hard for you as it is for me?

The only way to learn that kind of trust is through practice.

Just as dropping the kids off at school gets easier – and even becomes joyful – after that first tearful goodbye, the more we set down whatever we've been doing, the better we get at it. Try 15 minutes to go on a walk or sit in prayer. Take a day away from work, caregiving, the chores – they will wait. Yes, the work is important, but you will come back better, more like the

person you know yourself to be. Just like anything we do well, rest takes practice; trust takes practice.

*God gives sleep to God's beloved.*

The first verse of this psalm mentions another way in which our labor might become vain: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” This part isn’t about rest, but about focus and purpose, about *how* and *why* we do our work – or maybe *what* work we do.

I think about our church. We could work and work and do any number of things in hopes of making our church succeed or grow, but – if we are not doing the work of Christ, the core work of caring for the poor, meeting people with compassion, welcoming the marginalized, building the beloved community – then everything else becomes vain.

I ask myself, what did Jesus do with his time? He found the oppressed, discouraged, hungry, and unfairly judged, and he blessed them with what he had to give.

This has been a brutal season of election. Many things have been said that devalue the image of God in other human beings. Many people feel disheartened at the division in the country and a sense that others feel so differently on issues that are meaningful to them at the very core of their lives.

In light of this, I want to affirm our commitment to be a sanctuary for all, to be people who work in pursuit of building God's Beloved Community, and people who believe that every one of the 8.2 billion people on this Earth are God's cherished children, regardless of religion, nationality, sexuality, race, gender or economic standing.

God loves beyond and above the categories we create to divide ourselves.

We pray that we might pursue the common good in a way that says “no” to hatred, “no” to violence, and “yes” to Love and cooperation and persistence in mercy.

In closing, invite you, at the end of worship, to come up and take a piece of this fresh bread, a symbol of rest and trust, a symbol that we are going to let ourselves eat what is good, the spiritual nourishment of trust, the nourishment of rest, instead of the bread of anxious toil.

Amen.