



Bread for the world: a world of hunger. Wine for all peoples: people who thirst. May we who eat be bread for others. May we who drink pour out our love.

Not exactly the most uplifting set of readings for *not*-the-most uplifting time with the virus and everything else. Nevertheless, I could not help but get caught up with a word only a few lines in this morning: one of those words I can hear my seminary preaching professor begging us future pastors to avoid using at all costs. Because, as much as we as the church try our absolute darndest to be overly hospitable to all children of God all over the faith map with our sign out-front, our bulletins, our website and social media pages; to make everything as user-friendly as humanly possible, we still have this rather nagging tendency to use insider-church terms

that may not be as well known by the not-as-frequent pew-occupying crowd. It's not a big deal to us: most of *us* know what those special and informative words mean. We have been tossing them around since Confirmation, and it's just part of our normal Christian language.

However, *consecrate* may not be as well known to the general population, including the not-as-frequent pew-occupying crowd. And yet, many Christians use the word especially with Communion. We say the pastor *consecrates* the elements, so that they are no longer just a piece of bread and a few drips of wine: somehow, someway, they are surrounded and immersed in the presence of our Risen Lord, so that they are, instead, the body and blood of Christ himself. Now, how it happens exactly, we do not know for sure; so, we will stick with our big-kid church word, *consecrate*, and leave it at that!

Except, the word is used in Zephaniah not with Communion elements, but *people* are consecrated. Yet again, I am drawn back to my seminary preaching professor, for whom I will admit my utmost bias in saying is one of the best preachers I have ever heard (for the small portion of my life that I have actually paid attention to any preaching whatsoever). I remember his sermon during what was *not*-the-most-uplifting-time for us seminary students about a decade ago. Just over a year before, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly made the pivotal decision to lift up those in same-gendered relationships to serve as pastors in our wider church, while also paving the way for ELCA pastors to preside over such weddings, if they so desired. Let's just say some of our sister congregations did not approve of that vote and left the ELCA altogether. That was a blow in of itself, but it also meant that there would be less possible places for us to serve with in the future.

Beyond that, worship attendance across the board began to plummet, which not only affected individual congregations across the wider church, but also meant less people going to seminary, which meant less money coming in, and who knows how much that would affect us already there in terms of tuition and administrative costs to off-set that shortfall, and then, that could lead some students into pulverizing debt. It was a time of great uncertainty for us, not knowing what the church was about to look like for which we were called to serve with: to consecrate not just bread and wine, but, in a way, we were called to consecrate time and people; to convince the whole world there was as much God then, even amidst uncertainty galore, as there ever was before.

And so, I remember my seminary preaching professor using the image of the bread, because, at that time, when we celebrated Communion on the seminary campus, we used an actual loaf of it. But he pointed out the fact that that bread, the very bread that was made holy, still had to be broken apart. In order to make the greatest impact, in order for holy moments to occur amongst all those gathered in that sacred room, Christ's body had to be taken apart to be shared with us all. As if to serve as a holy Gospel reminder that beauty in this life can still exist in the moments of our own heart-wrenching brokenness.

So, we wanna-be pastors, in a sense, had to be broken apart from relationships we created with our colleagues for years. We had to break apart from the very campus that became a safe-haven for us during those bleakest-outlook times. And yet, just as with a broken piece of bread that can spiritually nourish our soul to the very core of our being: it was, evidently, possible for imperfect, but cherished children of God, in far-from ideal circumstances, to still bring the most beautiful Great News to life.

The readings this morning may make us feel broken, yearning for the Good News in the not overly pleasant verses. These recent months and days have done their part to do us in altogether. But time and time again, God insists on consecrating *us* for the sake of this world that God still so loves. God insists on making *us* a sacred glimpse of the very body of Christ that was broken so that we could feel whole in spite of whatever may happen with a virus or anything else. Even if it is not found in any of these verses today, it still remains true: no brokenness of any sort, absolutely nothing that can happen in this life, will now or ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our still-Risen Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!