

Bread and Roses

[John 12:1-8](#)

[Bread and Roses](#) by Judy Collins

*As we go marching, marching
In the beauty of the day
A million darkened kitchens
A thousand mill lofts gray

*Are touched with all the radiance
That a sudden sun discloses
For the people hear us singing
Bread and roses, bread and roses

*As we go marching, marching
We battle too for men
For they are women's children
And we mother them again

*Our lives shall not be sweated
From birth until life closes
Hearts starve as well as bodies
Give us bread, but give us roses...

*Helen Todd was a leading speaker in the suffragette movement. The phrase “bread and roses” came from a woman’s reaction to a speech she gave. Todd explained it like this, “woman is the mothering element in the world and her vote will go toward helping forward the time when life's Bread, which is home, shelter and security, and the Roses of life, music, education, nature and books, shall be the heritage of every child that is born in the country, in the government of which she has a voice.”¹ The phrase Bread and Roses was picked up in a poem by James Oppenheimer and popularized by another suffragette, *Rose

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread_and_Roses#Oppenheim's_poem

Schneiderman, and soon “We want Bread and Roses Too” was on banners and placards across the country.

I am grateful for their work which led to women having the vote and began a huge shift in the acceptance of woman as equal partners to men. I wonder what Todd and Schneiderman would think about some of the new laws regarding voting registration?

But the reason I bring this up today is not to get into a long discussion of democracy and equality but rather to highlight the need for both bread **and** roses.

*Today’s gospel seems to suggest that we have to choose - feed the poor or enjoy the extravagant perfume of human intimacy. Bread or Roses.

But look at who is making the comment – it’s Judas, who chooses personal profit and transactional exchanges over deeper relationship. Later he will betray Jesus – how? With a kiss, using a symbol of close loving relationship for his own profit. It seems that Judas will always trample the roses trying to get the most bread for himself.

Now of course we need bread – we all need the basic necessities of life, of which bread is a symbol. And as the Body of Christ in the world part of our ministry is to bring bread to those who need it – which we do literally at the Community Dinners and Peoples Kitchen, and practically through Laundry Love and the Abundance Shop. And also through our donations to help Ukrainian refugees and people living in other places in the world where there is poverty and peace is fragile.

But *as Jesus said to Satan when he was being tempted at the beginning of his ministry, “Humans do not live on bread alone.” Our bodies are sustained by food and water but our souls are sustained by beauty and intimacy – our souls are sustained by God.

Look at the three siblings in this story – Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus has just been raised from the dead and he is eating with Jesus and the other disciples; Martha is of course, serving dinner and Mary – Mary is worshiping. We can see it as a picture of balance – looking after one’s physical needs, serving others, and worshiping God.

*Perhaps worshiping is not quite the right word – there is so much going on here. She is expressing her deep love and intimate closeness with Jesus the man and is anointing him as though he is already dead yet he is not dead he is alive. Perhaps we can see Mary as a picture of our soul’s longing for union with God.

St. Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.” This is what fuels our longing for God. We may not be aware of it in the way that Augustine was or that Mary was in the gospel reading, but there is something in us that moves us toward God – or perhaps it is the very act of being alive that moves us toward God, * just as a rose becomes a rose; its very act of living is to become completely a rose – so to our very act of living is to be in relationship with God thus becoming fully human, fully Christ-like.

Which is why – slight digression here – which is why when we don’t know how to pray for someone like President Putin we can always pray that they will be granted the deepest desires of their heart, for the deepest desire of the human heart is to be one with God.

Note that I don’t say our deepest desire is to believe in the Nicene Creed or attend church or even read the Bible. Our deepest desire is to know God and that will look different for each one of us. God has made us each unique and God who permeates all things has a unique relationship with each one. The way I experience and relate to God is different from the way you do. Sometimes it seems that people struggle with this relationship because they think it should look a certain way.

We can’t all be Mary. We don’t have the feet of Jesus to anoint. But her relationship with the Christ is no more or less valid than yours.

*But to return to my main point – we don’t have to choose, bread or roses.

We don’t have to choose whether to serve the poor or to adore Jesus. We get to do both, in fact both are vital to a healthy life in Christ. A healthy life for every human being includes a deep experience of beauty whether

through music, art, nature or relationship. And in that beauty is the love of God expressed in the beauty of the created and expanding universe.

*So in our ministry to others let us be aware that they too need both bread and roses. Yes they need the things they can buy inexpensively at the Abundance Shop, but they also need the interaction with the cashiers, the sorters and with Esta, the manager. Our ministry may take place through transactions of giving and receiving, of buying and selling, but what gives it life is relational. What gives it life is the care we show for one another, the love and the prayer that we offer our neighbor. Not just clean clothes and pizza but respect and caring. Not just practical assistance but the love of Christ.

Our primary ministry is not to be social workers nor to be political activists though those are important. Our primary ministry is to share the love of God with each other and with all those around us. Our ministry is to love God to the very best of our ability so that the perfume of that love fills the whole house, wherever we are. And our ministry is to love our neighbor with bread and with roses too.

*Let us serve our community with the bread baked by Martha and the roses and precious nard of Mary.