

SWEETBREAD AND COFFEE

July 2020

Last month we 'attended' the live-stream Worship Service of the East Greenwich RI UMC. It was Communion Sunday, typically celebrated there on the first Sunday of each month. As an aside, some churches argue that Communion should be celebrated every Sunday - John Wesley believed that. The first church that I served thought that once a quarter was plenty. 'Virtual Communion' presents unique issues. And, another aside, now that some churches are returning to their buildings, the issue of serving Communion safely during a pandemic adds yet another dimension.

In any event it was Communion Sunday, and we were told: "This Sunday we will be inviting you to share in Communion as we break bread through our live-stream connection. You can use any form of bread and any form of juice or wine. At the Last Supper Jesus and his disciples would have used wine and unleavened bread. But you can choose what will work for you."

We hadn't planned ahead - our coffee had just been poured - we had had sweetbread for dinner the night before. Voila! Communion! What worked best for us that morning was sweetbread and coffee. Whoa! Never in my wildest dreams did I ever consider that those who be our Communion elements!

At the time of Communion, Pastor William Trench pronounced the Blessing over the bread: "Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam hamotzi lekhem min ha'aretz." Blessed are you Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who causes bread to come forth from the earth."

Portuguese sweetbread is a delight - sweet, light, airy, it is a bread to be savored. It is a delicacy, especially to be enjoyed at Christmas and Easter - good any day! As I tasted the sweetness again, now blessed by the ancient Hebrew Prayer that Jesus must have used at the Last Supper, I thought back to my years as a Pastor in New Bedford - the population of the city was over half Portuguese. I remember hard working people whose sense of community was fierce - good people - common people in the best sense of the word - good memories - holy even. Our Communion took on a much larger dimension.

As I sipped the coffee, ever so common in our household, now blessed by an ancient Hebrew Prayer, I thought back to a day in Nicaragua. While we were driving up the side of Volcon Mombacho, we were detoured through a coffee plantation. Our guide took advantage of the unplanned excursion to explain the work of this particular plantation. It is a small farm and the coffee is grown under the canopy of enormous and unique cloud forest trees that are found only in that region of Central America. The coffee grown here is considered a delicacy in Nicaragua, and it is! Nicaragua is a poor country, and working a coffee plantation on the steep sides of a semi-dormant volcano is hard work. But the reward is worth it. Again our communion took on a much larger dimension.

And so, because of a pandemic, we celebrated a very different Communion in our home. But we were not alone - we were surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses that extended far beyond our little space. Sweetbread and coffee - blessed by an ancient Hebrew Prayer - it was a most Holy Communion indeed!