

***BREAD
OF
LIFE***

PHOTO JEREMY YAP (UNSPLASH.COM)

Kendall Vanderslice on how baking bread teaches us about rest, trust and God's love.

BY RENEE JAMES

B

“BREAKING BREAD IS INCREDIBLY HARD on your body physically,” says Kendall Vanderslice, professional baker, writer, theologian and a James Beard Foundation national scholar for her work bridging food and religion. She should know. After college, she worked long hours in a bakery. Bread bracketed her Sundays; long early morning baking of bread capped off by Sunday evening services where bread was broken and shared during Communion. Even as she left the punishing labour of the bakery to focus on writing her masters thesis, she kept baking a loaf of bread every Sunday. “It was a rhythm that healed me,” she remembers.

For Kendall, bread is funny, fabulous, simple, yet at its core – incredibly complex. “There’s so much more to learn about bread and baking bread. Bread is endlessly surprising and there’s almost no end to what it still left for us to learn.” It’s that element of mystery and trust that makes her consider bread the ideal metaphor for our faith and the making of bread a deep spiritual practice.

“It goes back to Christ’s words to John. Christ calls Himself the Bread of Life and in John 1

He’s identified as the Word made flesh,” Kendall reminds me. “So often in Western Christianity we focus on the Word; having correct doctrine; the right words. Our faith happens in our heads, but when Christ says that He is bread, we come to Christ and can know Him with our senses,” she continues. In fact, Kendall believes that many of our spiritual practices – the habits in our lives that support and sustain our relationship with Jesus – need to be ones that we do with our bodies, using our senses. Like baking bread. “In the making of bread, we get to know creation and we get to know the God who calls himself Bread.”

REST AND TRUST

In his book *Out of the House of Bread – Satisfying Your Hunger for God With the Spiritual Disciplines*, Preston Yancey prefaces his bread recipe with these words: “Total time is about six hours, though only a fourth of that requires your direct involvement. You’re waiting the rest of the time. (p. 31).” The bulk of the transformation that turns flour, water and yeast into bread happens while the dough is at rest.

“Living is all about trust – that Christ is doing what He said He would do.”

“This teaches us how to live as disciples of Jesus,” says Kendall. “We begin to understand that over time, transformation happens. We can’t see it but we can trust that God is at work in our lives.”


This understanding has shaped Kendall’s journey with God. She delights in the freedom that the surety of transformation over time – during rest – has given her. “It’s given me the ability to go slowly; that even if all I’m doing is just ‘the next step,’ that over time, I’m doing the work.” In fact, as she points out, so much of the work is “outside of her and of us, just like so much of the work with bread is reliant on the yeast, microbes, room temperature and more.” Christ controls our lives. So much is outside of us and so “living is all about trust – that Christ is doing what He said He would do.”

Even so, Kendall agrees – a baker has to know her numbers; has to weigh and measure. She needs to know whether her loaf will rise or not. A wise baker, like a wise disciple, puts things in place that make for a successful loaf and Jesus-centred life. And yet, “she can be correct and right with all these things,” Kendall softly challenges. “But if she doesn’t let the bread rest, she won’t get what she wants. Formation takes time!”

INTIMACY

Kendall’s relationship with bread has taught her about God’s love of us: He loves us in tactile ways; His act of creation was an act of love; His desire to create humanity in this world and to delight in them was an act of love; the fact that God created us in bodies that need to eat is an act of love.

COMMUNITY

God also created us to live in community. Breaking bread together remains the most basic expression of that truth. The inability to meet regularly in-person since spring 2020 is hard and it should be hard because it runs counter to how God created us. Even so, Kendall suggests that the distancing can teach us something about how important it is for us to be together. She also points to ways in which we can find respite in the midst of distance. In 2020, she would bake a big box of small loaves. These loaves would be dropped off to every person in her church. Every one would then gather over Zoom to eat their loaves together in a dinner service. As Kendall says, “our very existence is an outpouring of God’s love and He continues to show us that love in the gift of food and in the gift of community.” 



Kendall’s suggestions on preparing for her Saturday morning workshop at our April Conference *Shaped by Love, Shaped to Love*

Think about when you’re in the kitchen. Even you’re being quick, take a brief moment to consider that God is present with you in your kitchen and in the movement of chopping up vegetables and pulling dishes together and sliding them into the oven to bake.

Listen to the podcast *Kitchen Meditations*. Kendall designed these 20-minute podcasts for you to listen to while you’re in the kitchen. They may helpful to get you thinking about God while you’re in the kitchen and doing tasks in that space and time.

Visit You’ll find that podcast and more at edibletheology.com and at kendallvanderslice.com