

(Word count:1000)

## You Are the Bread and the Wine

(adapted from *You Are There* by Robert Campbell, Cascade Books, 2016).

I make bread as a hobby; sometimes it is more than a hobby. I mean, I am a little obsessed with the idea, the preparation, process and especially the taste of bread. Actually, I think I have a gluten-free intolerance. It was a school chaplain who first turned me on to it. He told a story in chapel one day about how making bread slows him down in the midst of all the mental chaos that university study brings with it. I could use some slowing down, so I made my first loaf and set it to rise under a tree in the yard of our very first married place, a little Grandma suite on a hillside with a view. The bread over proofed in warm sun and was a total failure. But it didn't stop me from baking and it most certainly wasn't my last failure. Julie sent me to a bread making class at a local cooking school, just so someone could put my hands on a batch of dough and say, "this is what it is supposed to feel like," and I've never looked back.

Sourdough is the holy grail of bread in my opinion and my family has always agreed. Our then ten-month-old son sat with us for three hours at a dinner table eating San Francisco sourdough bread during my sister's wedding rehearsal dinner. Every time he got fussy, we just tossed him another piece and all was right with the world. Sourdough somehow lines up heaven and earth. I am sure there was sourdough in the Garden of Eden. And yet, any attempt I made at sourdough bread failed over and over again. One Sunday I had grand plans to make Matzo bread for the communion service. It turned out beautiful on Saturday night. Handing the bread to the preparers the next day, I went about my Sunday morning routine and continued into the service until it was time for communion. We read from the Scriptures, "On the night he was betrayed, he took bread . . ." and we handed out the bread. After a prayer I spoke the words to my people, "The gifts of God for the people of God," and "Take and eat it, all of you, feed on him in you hearts by faith with thanksgiving." And they ate. At least they chewed . . . and chewed . . . and

chewed. That bread was like rubber in my mouth. I'm supposed to speak again after the bread, but I can't get it down. More than that, I am supposed to speak blessings and all I can think about is cursing the preparers for not telling me the bread was inedible! I swallowed hard and went on without looking anyone in the face and I gave up on sourdough entirely for over a decade, until recently.

My friend Bethany gave me a bit of starter that she had been nurturing for a few years and I've slowly turned it into Santa Margarita sourdough, or more affectionately known as #margaritasourdough. Sourdough is bread made by the long fermentation of wheat flour and water. It takes on the bacteria and yeast of the locality in which it lives. When I feed my sourdough starter with water from the mineral rich town well, it is literally Santa Margarita sourdough. We are actually consuming a little bit of Santa Margarita whenever we eat it. The town is becoming a physical part of us more and more every day.

The same is true for the local wine. The Paso Robles appellation runs throughout much of northern San Luis County and produces many award winning wines. You may find them on your shelves labeled "California Central Coast" or "Paso Robles." Over my back fence, on that old Santa Margarita Ranch, are approximately 930 acres of magnificent grapes, laid out by the legendary Mondavi family for Ancient Peaks Vineyards. Being the good neighbors that we are, we support this local business and our friends who own and run it. They wisely take advantage of the unique terroir to create bottles of fermented magic. The terroir is the specific geography, geology and climate of the place that creates a taste that cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the world. One such place in the AP vineyard is known as "Oyster Ridge," due to the giant fossilized oysters shells that quite literally push up out of the soil on that hilltop. Coastal fog pours over the Cuesta Pass, just fourteen miles from the Pacific Ocean, like waves that came in with just a little too much force. It slides and drips down over the ridge causing the warm daytime temperatures to drop dramatically and the grape sugars to spike. Little pocket

microclimates are common for our region. Frost often settles on one part of town while entirely passing over another, just a block away. The wine that bears the Oyster Ridge name stands out for the rich mineral taste and fine tannins that make it a star on our local tables. When we drink that wine, we are drinking Santa Margarita. The place becomes a part of us as much as we are a part of it.

Here is what I'm getting at: You are the bread and the wine of your place. Do you hear the biblical hints in that statement? That is, God has put the place in you and you in the place. The place meets God through you and God meets the place through you in the local church. The local church is God's way of getting His people in the right place, restored people to restore people and places. Santa Margarita is that place for me. God is making me whole again . . . and he is doing it here, with my toes in this dirt, with this dirt in my body through the vegetables, the cattle, the water and the wine. I am trying to put you in your place . . . and you are going to thank me for it.