

The Baker is somewhere else

‘Given a city centre appointment without a church and a pair of legs that only raise me to the lofty height of five foot two, it is hardly surprising that I have worked with an image of God as a baker rather than a boss’ writes **BARBARA GLASSON**

It may be something to do with personality type but I do have some trouble with plans. Probably because most the ones I have ever attempted have swiftly gone skittering off in rather unlikely directions. I also struggle with the idea of a God who sits on some celestial managing director’s chair directing operations from on high. Maybe that is why I make bread?

So, given a blank sheet of paper, a city centre appointment without a church and a pair of legs that only raise me to the lofty height of five foot two, it is hardly surprising that I have worked with an image of God as a baker rather than a boss. And maybe that’s why the church that has emerged does not fit into any tramlines of authenticity – and why we call it ‘Somewhere Else’

Somewhere Else is a random selection of odd bods that God has sent to be around the kitchen table in a room above the bookshop News from Nowhere on one of Liverpool’s most eclectic shopping streets. If you ring the bell marked ‘Methodists Somewhere Else’ (and don’t take this as a signal we’re not there) you will gain access to this remarkable community. Bread is created, shaped, proved and baked three times a week by whoever shows up. And what is most remarkable is that ‘whoever’ also seems to have turned into a community that wants to pray, worship and read the Scriptures. This church may not have been planned – but there is certainly a hint of Providence about.

Why bread? Well, there are so many flavours of the Gospel in bread – yeast, oil, honey, salt, water and of course the brown wholegrain flour that is the staff of life. But more than that, bread making is a process that demands a bit of space and attention. You work hard mixing all the ingredients and then you wait for the yeast to get going. And in this waiting and attentiveness the bread encourages us to give each other some space and attention too as we stand shoulder to shoulder around the table.

Making one loaf for ourselves – whoever we are – and one loaf to give away, there is a spirit of generosity evoked by bread. Sometimes some of the bakers have never been able to make and give a gift before. Mix this with the natural process of remembering that originates in the smells and flavours of the final product and there is plenty of scope for story telling, laughter, sharing and change. Bread making is a simple, wholesome process which, as the bread of the Eucharist has demonstrated, embodies another reality amongst us, that God is not distant and remote but alongside and connected.

I am learning that the church does not have to be a thing that is set in stone but can be a life giving process. Something to be opened up with possibilities not closed down by planning. That is not to say that this is a free for all. There is a recipe of

■ If you have a personal story to tell, do get in touch.



photo: Jocelyn Conway

respect that we have devised that encourages us to relate in life giving ways. We endeavour to be inclusive and find that that challenges some very deep rooted assumptions. We attempt to be a safe place and so need to set boundaries on our way of relating. We are conscious that amongst us, as in every church community, there are those who have been abused by others. It is hard work being church in such a way that we can see and hold difference creatively. This bread thing is life-changing for all of us.

And it is a bit of a roller coaster. The Big Issue guys from the doorstep find us a positive place of connection in the middle of chaotic lives. George sleeps in a wheelie bin and drinks at least three litres of cider during the hours of darkness. Philip is a local solicitor who tries to make bread in his lunch hour without getting his suit covered in flour. Karen is our community police officer and calls by for some lunch. At half term kids love to be

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elbow high in dough. And a number of our community have learning difficulties and are teaching us how to pray with true simplicity, not to mention Kim who is teaching us how to dance! A place of acceptance and love engendered by the bread – a place of anger management and healthy eating – a place of struggle and gift – a place of reality, where God, the master baker, lovingly puts floury hand prints on our backs.

‘Do you know what Providence is?’ George asked me last week whilst we washed the dishes and waited for the loaves to cool. I thought it was quite an unlikely question and he waited patiently whilst I stumbled through an answer. ‘Thing is, Barbara,’ he said, ‘Providence, you see, I think it’s happening to me!’

about the writer

The Revd Barbara Glasson (pictured above in the white apron) is a Methodist minister in Liverpool City Centre, working with an emerging church community that bakes bread. In her recently published book *I Am Somewhere Else* (DLT, £9.95) which is reviewed on page 21 of this issue, she reflects on her unusual and innovative ministry. Barbara trained in agricultural sciences at Nottingham University before studying theology at Nottingham and Hull. She is also a mother, poet and a walker of dogs.