

Fred's Bread and the Kingdom of Heaven, Marketing, Growth and Success

In 1994 Andrea and Steve made their first loaf of bread in a tiny apartment Kitchen in Toronto. It was the beginning of Fred's Bread, bakery in the city.

Andrea's mother had taught her how to cook. She cooked with care and with love for her family. Many of us grew up with the smell of home cooked food as the welcome home sensation. Andrea loved baking and at the age of 10 she made her first venture in a Yard Bake Sale. She ended up her training at a New York cookery school.

Steve did an MBA at the UofT and his final project was writing up a business plan for "Fred's Bread", a hypothetical bakery. It got him an "A" and a bank loan to start up the business in 1995. They began baking together and delivering the bread to individual customers in an old Toyota Tercel affectionately known as "Fred".

The business has grown and now they sell through 31 different food shops in Toronto and southern Ontario.

It is a lovely story of success. "Hand-crafted and hearth-baked breads made with 100% natural ingredients, unbleached, and organic flours begin to define what Fred's Breads is all about."

The bakery is part of a quiet movement, in Canada and beyond, that stands against the dogma that growth is always good, and if you can do more, then you should. It is about simplicity, authenticity and about being genuinely who you are and without any shortcuts.

Most of the bread we buy in Supermarkets is designed by industrial chemists. It can last for days in its packaging. It is made from wheat out of which the germ, the bit with all the nutrition, has been extracted, because that extends its shelf-life and makes it taste fluffy. It is made in factories by machine and distributed by trucks and sold by strangers.

I have always had a thing about bread, and bake about half the bread we eat at home. When my children were in school I worked half-time so that I could be home when they got out, and I could give them home made cookies and fresh bread and real food for supper. I love good bread! I wanted to give them the bread of life.

Jesus began his ministry perhaps when he was baptised by John in the Jordan and had the experience of God speaking to him. God said, "You are my son, my beloved. I am well pleased with you!" He was maybe 30, and what he had been doing before that we can guess at, but do not know. He spent 40 days, the duration of the season of Lent that we are presently in, walking in the Wilderness of Judea. He was alone, he was questioning himself and facing the temptations and illusions of what it would be like to give his life to God as his son.

I am not sure that Jesus had a business plan! But he started out in Galilee, home turf, and slowly worked his way outwards. He made followers at home, and then from outlying towns. He branched in to Samaria and wherever he went his fame enlarged and his ministry blossomed. Eventually he entered Jerusalem and was greeted as the deliverer of Israel with palm branches, hymns of praise and a procession along crowd-packed roads.

Then some Greeks asked to see him. Israel was a small part of the world. The big part of the world was Greek. Greek was the language of the Empire, of learning, of wisdom, of truth. Greek was "The Big Time"

Jesus' brand of Judaism that had gone from village to district to city was about to go global!

Philip and Andrew, Greek speakers from cosmopolitan Bethsaida, must have been beside themselves with excitement. Jesus could even use this entry as a way to sidestep the difficult Jewish authorities and just move on into the whole empire....who knows!

We live in a culture that is unquestioning about growth. Growth is good. That is all there is to it. The bigger the better. And any definition of success is similarly applauded. We are a culture of progress, growth and success. So it is very important to notice what Jesus does when the “big break” appears in front of him. Jesus turns towards his death.

This is one of the huge moments in the story of Jesus’ life, and we need to notice it.

Because an exit route to glory, and away from conflict and pain suddenly appeared, Jesus had to make that decision. He had to go back to those temptations in the wilderness, the temptations that you have been pondering in your Lenten weeks. The temptations about looking out for his own needs (stones to bread), about using what God has given him for his own glory (Jumping from the pinnacle) and about having fame and the whole world follow him (the high mountain). He had to decide.

So what is the nature of this decision? And why did I start with Fred’s Bread?

The decision is based in the heart. Outside the heart are success and failure. Outside are the opinions of others, inside is the wondering of your soul. Inside are the questions of Who you are, and Whose you are.

For Andrea and Steve (who, incidentally I do not know, but read about on their website fredsbread.ca) I think they knew that they were going to need to be small to stay true to hand made, reliable goodness. They are local, particular and will always be able to attest for what they offer. Small bakeries, microbreweries, local bike shops, community markets like Evergreen Brickworks. They are all guided by a desire for integrity ahead of profit, for sustainability ahead of growth, for relationships ahead of bank accounts.

For Jesus, turning towards the Cross was a statement of his inner faith. His loyalty to the Father who had called him, well-pleasing and beloved, that was the core value of Jesus. If Jesus had an audience whose applause he sought, that audience was his Father. No one else. Instead of taking the growth-oriented, people-pleasing, success-driven, crowd-cheering option of going with the international market (the Greeks), Jesus took the path of inner integrity. He would walk the path that God had put before him. And even if he could not quite see how it would work out well, he would trust in God, that God would bring blessings from what might seem a failure in the eyes of his disciples.

So this last Sunday of Lent, before we enter Palm Sunday and the story of the Passion, these questions arise for us. What is your inner integrity worth to you? Are you true in your life to the person God longs for you to be? Is there a gap between who you think yourself to be and the self you present to the world? Is that gap acceptably small or is it uncomfortably large?

Polonius in Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” says to his son as he leaves home...

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

To be faithful to the self you have before God is to be faithful to God. And from that choice, we believe as Christians, God can do anything. **There is a Doxology: (BAS, Page 214)**

Glory to God, whose power, working in us, (just as we are) can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.