

PBJ. What comes to mind when you hear those three letters put together? ... Peanut butter and jelly: staple food for most of us growing up, and even today I find myself craving this sandwich, especially with a bowl of chicken noodle soup. It's a basic part of life that many of us have grown up—knowing there is always some PBJ in the cabinet. Or if that particular sandwich is not your preference, then there is probably something else readily available for lunch or supper.

But for many in the world, the letters PBJ may represent something other than just a sandwich. Rather than peanut butter, they may experience the letter P as standing for Problems. I think it's an issue most of us can relate to, for we've all run into one kind of problem or another. Lack of money. Illness. Death of a loved one.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who faced the same issue: P is for Problems. Probably the most famous problem story is the one related to the last letter in PBJ: J is for Job. The story is in the form of a drama, with the main characters of Job and God. The scene begins with God in the heavenly courtroom,

bragging about how wonderful Job is. *Ha-satan*, a Hebrew word meaning the adversary, is a member of the courtroom and suggests that if Job's life had P for Problems, then maybe he wouldn't be such a great guy. The narrator tells us this figure introduced all kinds of Problems into Job's life: from physical illness to the loss of property and wealth. Other characters enter into the story, trying to bring some advice along the way. Job's wife and several friends suggest a number of explanations about why all the bad things happened in his life, such as you "you must have done something wrong," but Job just doesn't buy their advice. He knows that some Problems just don't make sense.

How many times have we done that—try to blame ourselves or someone else in order to explain the Problems we encounter? Sometimes we cannot find an explanation, and that dilemma can be a scary feeling. Not knowing what's going on can leave us feeling unsettled, uneasy, apprehensive.

We also see the struggle of Problems reflected in Mark's story of Jesus' encounter with some religious leaders. They wanted to know how to deal with

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divorce, for they knew from the book of Deuteronomy¹ that ancient laws said a man could write a certificate of dismissal just because he found something unpleasant and objectionable about his wife. Jesus reminded his listeners that God's original vision was for two people to come together and to not be torn apart. Although Jesus may have challenged the men listening to him to avoid divorce just because your wife displeases you, I think Jesus would have also recognized that sometimes the original vision of what God intended may not always work. The forces in life can tear apart people, sometimes to the point where healing only occurs after a marriage dies.

Right after this discussion, Jesus offered the model of a child as the one who can teach us about what being with God is like. Although the disciples wanted to keep the children away from him, Jesus welcomed them, suggesting that they are the ones who can teach us how to know God.

I enjoy watching young children, for even though they may fall down and cry at the pain of hitting the ground, after a hug and a kiss, they are up and laughing and running around again. They encounter

Problems, just like the rest of us, but somehow they bounce back, trusting that life is still something exciting and worth exploring. Children can remind us a lot about our trust in God: even though we run into Problems, just as Job experienced, God never leaves us. God did not agree with the easy answers of Job's friends, and sometimes we may not find easy answers, but God never abandons us. God struggles along with us, sensing our pain and offering us hope along the way, which is something a young homeless teenage girl learned through the help of others when she discovered she was expecting a son who had a very rare illness.

Video: Alli and André²

PBJ. At this point you may be saying, "Ok, I understand that P stands from Problems, and that J stands for Job, who reminds us that God is with us in the midst of Problems. But what does the B stand for?"

This letter is the most basic part of PBJ: Bread. And of all Sundays, what a wondrous day to celebrate Bread: not only our Bread for the World special offering, but World Communion Sunday, a day when

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churches all over the world recognize that we celebrate together this central event of our faith. We Disciples are used to celebrating communion every Sunday, but some churches may offer it only monthly or quarterly. Some churches may offer it to only members, but on this day, we as Disciples of Christ celebrate that for us, this is an open table. This Bread is not only for us, but for all those who trust in God's loving presence. When Jesus broke the bread with his disciples, he recalled the Passover event when God helped their people thousands of years earlier escape from the bondage of the Pharaoh.

When we come to this table today, God still offers liberation:

For those facing Problems in life, God offers the patience of Job and the promise that life can get better.

For those in war torn countries, God offers the vision of a peace-filled life.

For those in relationships that are torn apart, God offers reconciliation and healing, even if two go their separate ways.

For those who struggle financially, God offers the richness of hope that comes in ways other than lots of money.

For those facing illness or death, God offers healing that can take place in this world and in world-to-come.

And for those who are hungry, God offers Bread. Something as simple as PBJ—even if only the Bread—can bring relief to someone starving.

But Bread offers even a broader vision: Christ has come into the world, experienced death, and even in the face of such terror, God could still bring about amazing new life.

I imagine you will never eat a PBJ sandwich quite the same way, for it not only feeds our bodies, but it feeds our souls as well!

¹ Deut. 24:1-4

² From Bread for the World,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=hU8PR_DX0so&list=PL6FA1FFB1F0878159&index=3&feature=plcp