

# DAILY BREAD

“Grain of Hope : Slice of Heaven”

## SOIL

Think of soil as an ecosystem, a highly structured matrix of interactions between organisms and non-living (as opposed to dead) elements. Water and air might constitute around 40% of this matrix, minerals another 20% and the rest is creatures. A handful of soil is teeming with more organisms than there are people on earth. They are in constant flux, the living providing recycling services, the dead nourishing the living.

For our wheat, in its tub of mixed earth, compost and manure, the soil is anchor and support, transport and communications network, source of water and minerals, neighbourhood, home, identity - roots grow into the matrix to build something new. The relationship is intimate, happening in solution at the cellular and molecular level. Root hairs are one cell thick and able to absorb water and oxygen, and actively pump minerals across their membranes. When we harvest the wheat, we harvest the soil.

Every mouthful we eat depends on soil renewal. Soil loss across the planet from deforestation, intensive agriculture and erosion is accelerating. 12 million hectares are lost to desertification every year.

The UN estimates that there are around **60 harvests** left before soils worldwide are exhausted.

### Beatitudes of the Soil

Blessed are the insects broken down in death, for they will branch and travel.

Blessed are the fungi that live in darkness, for they will fuel growth towards light.

Blessed are the sickly trees, for food will be diverted to their roots.

Blessed are all decomposing things, for they will bear fruit.

Blessed are the earthworms, for the soil will pass through them and be changed.

Blessed are the unseen networks of hyphae, for they inherit the earth.

Blessed are these organisms for not being human, for they nurture without thought or choice.

Blessed is all wordless life, for it has no need of a moral language.

### Soil

a place  
we wipe away with door mats and language,  
pursing our lips at ‘mucky’, ‘grubby’, ‘soiled’;  
while beneath our feet  
the earth works its silent transformations  
and brings forth food;

a liminal place  
where death becomes life:  
where a broken fly-wing, a browning petal,  
shit, ancient bones and last night’s apple  
peelings  
merge into oneness  
and bear fruit.

a place of healing;  
uninfected when it receives  
a contagious body, treating human sickness  
with its earth-bacteria made into drugs;  
healing us all  
with rhythms slower than our human time.

a borderless place  
interchanging self and non-self:  
passing through an earthworm and returning  
to itself enriched. What is the identity  
of one hypha thread in a network pushing  
nutrients to weak trees?

an intimate place  
of slow-accreted history,  
a testimony to spade, to plough, to sweat:  
a whole archaeology  
of plant, human, animal existence  
sifted and coalescing in one clod.

a mysterious place  
of star-dust,  
a trace of an exploding supernova,  
of giddy space-journeys. A skin  
which hides horizons, layers of rock-time,  
a core of solid and molten fire.

Diane Pacitti, 2020

