

January 2009

### PARTICIPATING IN A PARTICIPLE

Sasha, the son of one of our church members, is a recovering alcoholic and has also had major surgery on his leg. His mother, Valentina, came up to me after worship one Sunday and said that he would like to come to our Christmas service and she wanted to know if it would also be possible for him to receive Communion. “Of course he can”, I said. “Do you think you could ring him and invite him?” she asked. “That would really impress him!” “Actually,” I responded, “I would really like to talk with him in person. Would it be okay if I pop round for a cup of tea on Thursday afternoon?” Valentina readily agreed and was also happy for me to bring Bob along too. (Bob is a regular visitor from our partner church in Memphis and had met Sasha before).

Bob and Sasha were soon deep in conversation about their favourite jazz artists and when we moved into a discussion about the meaning of Holy Communion, Bob said that if Sasha felt able to come on Sunday, he would really like to go up for Communion with him. Sasha was there – and later that day he sent Bob an email using a computer translation programme. “I was very moved to see all those people participating in a participle”. The Russian word which is used in the Methodist tradition for Holy Communion (*prechastiye*) can also be translated as “participle”! One of the words I used to practice pronouncing regularly when I was having my language lessons in Moscow before coming to serve in Pskov was “*prechashchayushshchikhhsya*”. I have to say this twice at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer – once when breaking the bread and once when elevating the cup. It is a verbal form of the noun “*prechastiye*” and translates as communicating/partaking/sharing. It has a much deeper sense in Russian, however, than any of these English meanings and really does convey something about “participating in a participle”! In other words, we become part of that in which we are taking part.

For the last couple of years, our Communion bread has been baked by a relatively new member of our church who came to us from another tradition, where it is essential for the bread to be unleavened. She always provides a larger piece for me (or Nelli) to break and individual pieces for each member of the congregation. There has been a bit of a rebellion recently with a number of people (including Sasha’s mother!) indicating when they come up for Communion that they would like a broken part of the larger “priest’s wafer” rather than one of the individual pieces. For them, it is very important that we all really do “participate in a participle” and literally share in one bread.

Over the next few months I will be breaking bread with my brothers and sisters in Christ in Cranleigh, Brentwood, Birmingham, Dublin, California and possibly Korea!! The ninety day stay which is permitted by my current visa comes to an end on January 20<sup>th</sup> and I will not be returning to Russia until April 3<sup>rd</sup>. I will then have another ninety days here before making my final departure on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

I am reminded once again of the words of St. Augustine: “You are to be taken, blessed, broken and distributed that the work of the Incarnation may go forward.”

Every blessing,

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