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(Dreamstime/Bhofack2)

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It's true. God works in mysterious ways. Even through bread pudding.

Before the virus pandemic occurred, I attended an evening of prayer at a local church. Attendees were invited to bring food to share as part of a social hour. I had been asked to greet people as they came in and to place any food dishes on a serving table. Not knowing many people in this particular parish, I was excited to have the opportunity to meet others.

All was going smoothly until about 10 minutes before the service was to start. At that time, a lady walked in alone with a large carrying case. I welcomed her, and when I offered to take her food, she was hesitant to let go of what she had prepared.

I directed her to the serving table and began to make a place for her dish. Again, she was hesitant to place it where I suggested. I did some more rearranging and when a suitable place was found, she opened the case.

Inside was the biggest, hottest, gooiest pan of bread pudding I had ever seen. By this time, the aroma had attracted a small crowd that was jockeying for position to get the first taste, so I mentioned that I was going to the kitchen to get a serving spoon.

That's when the lady said in a loud, forceful voice, "*Oh no no no*. I never serve it like that, I always cut it into pieces. Honey, I've been doing this for a long time, and I know what's best. Get a knife and cut it into pieces. Don't you know how to serve bread pudding?"

Upset by her harsh tone but not wanting to argue, I scurried to the kitchen to get a knife. As I cut the dessert into pieces, I wondered why this lady had been so demanding. It's only bread pudding, for goodness' sake. I said a prayer for her and decided to keep my distance for the rest of the evening.

Our prayer service began, and as luck (or rather God) would have it, we were randomly placed in the same small group. I must say at times she was a distraction for me. She spoke infrequently, but when she did speak, it was negative. There was a distinct edge to her voice. I think I spent more time trying to analyze her rather than fully listening to the service.

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Thankfully, by God's grace at some point in the evening, the Holy Spirit moved me to stop judging and start loving. When the program ended, I made my way over to her and thanked her for bringing food to share.

To my surprise, she began to cry and tell me about her husband's recent death and how hard things had been. They had been married almost 50 years and she missed him terribly. She and her husband had a small baking business, catering desserts for local meetings and parties. Bread pudding was her husband's favorite.

With him gone, her hobby, her life, just wasn't the same. Still weeping, she shared that she now spent her days visiting the cemetery. This was her first big outing since his death, and she thought it would help her to be with others and pray. The bread pudding was therapy for her and brought her comforting memories of her husband.

We stood there talking for a good half hour, neither one of us affected by the noisy busyness around us. Listening to her, I realized how hard it must have been for her to contribute this dish for us that night. God had met her where she was and offered her the grace to overcome her grief long enough to bake and share something from her heart. God was moving her out of her suffering into a place of eventual healing. How quickly I had judged her.

I was reminded that night that we all have our unpleasant moments, sometimes born out of a woundedness or brokenness. It's up to me, to all of us as followers of Jesus, to move past the judging and toward compassion. That night I made a new friend. Indeed, God moves in mysterious ways.

[Melinda Le Blanc is a spiritual director in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is passionate about helping others deepen their relationship with God through individual direction, group faith sharing, and retreats.]