

**Sermon - September 29, 2019**  
**Your Life as Bread: *What does it mean to be “given”?***  
**Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID**  
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Today is the last message in our 4-part series using bread as a metaphor for our lives ... where Jesus takes the bread into His hands ... blesses it, breaks it, and then gives it to the world.

So, today we are going to talk about that word “GIVEN”.

For example, what if you feel like you have nothing to give the world? Perhaps you only think *PURPOSE* is connected to *VALUE*.

If you are “just” an ordinary Christian, is there really anything to give from your life to the world? Let’s explore this question together.

Remember in our first Gospel lesson about Jesus meeting the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? When Jesus was at table with them “...he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” Luke 24:30

This is the third “Blessed Broken Given” story in Luke’s Gospel ... the third time Jesus takes bread into His hands, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it.

This is a moment of mission. This is Jesus blessing bread to open the eyes of people who are disillusioned and downcast.

In a way, this is a story that shows that being blessed, broken, and given, is for the sake of the world ... not just for ourselves, and certainly not just for the church.

So, what does it mean to be “given”? I would like to highlight what I believe are three responses to this question. First, to be given is to be motivated out of love for Jesus.

Before we talk about what it means to be given, perhaps we should ask WHY. Why should we allow our lives to be given for another? The obvious answer is that we should give our lives out of love, but I do not believe that it is that simple. What do we love in order to become given?

The answer again may seem obvious to some ... we love the person we are serving, the one to whom we are given. If your life is to be given for your children, then it is the love for your children that leads you to that place.

If your life is to be given in service to the poor, then it is the love for the poor that leads to that given-ness.

Yes, those are obvious answers. But allow me to make a case for why I believe that thinking may be wrong, or at least incomplete, and frankly, insufficient.

Think about it. Love for who we serve is not enough to sustain us, to carry us through the dark nights and the lonely hours. It won’t push us through the pain and the hurt we experience from the very ones we are trying to help.

If you don't believe me, just ask the apostle Peter. Remember our first Gospel lesson from John 21?

After the Resurrection, Peter returned to fishing. Think about it ... he ran to the tomb and saw that it was empty. He was, most likely, with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them.

He probably was there when Thomas placed his hands in Jesus side and on His hands. And still, Peter went back to his old livelihood of fishing.

Maybe Peter felt he had lost it all that night when he denied knowing Jesus three times. Maybe Peter was too confused about what the Resurrection really meant.

Perhaps Peter was just too covered in shame for it to matter. He might as well try to just live a quiet life, a smaller story. He probably felt that he could add no value to God's Kingdom.

But in our Gospel lesson we are told how Jesus found Peter, and reenacted the scene of their first encounter, the first time Jesus called Peter to follow Him.

"Throw your nets on the other side of the boat," the voice called out from the shore. Peter knew he had heard that voice before. But it was John who voiced recognition of Him when John cried out to Peter, "It is the Lord".

It might have been John who recognized Jesus first, but it was Peter who responded ... and responded radically. Peter threw on his robes and swam to shore, leaving the other disciples to drag the fish ... a big haul of fish ... behind the boat to shore.

I believe this rather dramatic event was just a case of Jesus REINSTATING Peter. He was reaffirming Peter's purpose, calling, and destiny.

The three repetitions of Jesus' question to Peter are meant to correspond to Peter's threefold denial. The most significant bit, however, is the one hidden in plain sight.

In this restorative, call-renewing conversation, Jesus asked Peter, simply, repetitively, and piercingly, "Do you love *me*?"

He did NOT ask, "Do you love the sheep?"

Not ask, "Do you love the food?" (meaning Jesus' teachings)

Not ask, "Do you love yourself?"

Not ask, "Do you love my purpose and mission?"

Jesus' question was simply, "Do you love me?"

In the other gospel accounts of Peter's first call, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men."

You might say that first call was about a purpose.

In essence Jesus said, "Peter, I'll lift you from a life that is going nowhere. I'll sweep you up in

the greatest story of all. I'll give you a role in the kingdom of God arriving on earth as it is in heaven. I'll make you a participant and not just a recipient."

THAT IS, AFTER ALL, WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GIVEN.

But let's be clear, it isn't the love of being given that leads to our given-ness. It isn't the love of a purpose that can sustain us. For example, in the end that was certainly NOT ENOUGH to keep Peter faithful. The love of a calling will never keep you from falling.

If Peter's first call was about a purpose, this second call ... this renewal of destiny and identity ... was about a person.

Do you love Jesus? Do you love Jesus above all else? Lesser loves may lead you to begin following Jesus, or even to enter into vocational ministry. But these lesser loves cannot sustain you.

The love of meaning or mission or purpose or the church will not keep you surrendering and serving. Only a deep and abiding love for Jesus can do that.

It is our love for Jesus that leads us to surrender to Him. And it is Jesus who gives us away for others. We surrender entirely out of love for Him.

And when we surrender, we find ourselves as bread in the hands of Jesus.

He sends us and spends us because of His love for us and for the world. And the sending is sweeter than you could have ever dreamed or imagined. This is how we become given for the life of the world ... through Jesus' hands.

What does it mean to be 'given'? To be given is first to be spent or motivated out of love for Jesus. But then, to be given is also to live for the life of the world.

On the way to Emmaus, two disciples hung their heads and hid their tears. Unable to quench the fire of their disappointment, they turned on each other, arguing and debating about the Messiah.

At that moment, Jesus Himself "arrived and joined them on their journey". We read in our Gospel lesson from Luke 24 that "Jesus joined the disappointed and the disillusioned in their journey."

He didn't say "Come over here" or "Come to Me" or "Come follow Me." No, that was all well and fine the first time. But not this time.

Not when faith had been shattered, when hopes had been badly broken. No, when we are too weak, too broken to come to Jesus, He comes to us. He Himself joins us on the journey.

We need to listen and learn, and then enter into the places of pain in our communities.

Like Jesus coming alongside the disillusioned disciples, we need to walk gently into the spaces where the de-churched and post-Christians have gone.

Jesus pointed to Himself as the culmination of God's saving story.

After asking them what they were talking about, and then acting ignorant about the events in Jerusalem the previous three days, Jesus began to explain to them from the law and the prophets, from the Bible, how it had been prophesied that the Messiah would have to suffer and then be raised up.

They had been reading the Scriptures wrong. Before they could recover from that paradigm shift, Jesus went on to another ... He showed them how the Scriptures spoke of Him.

We have to find a way to tell the world it's own story, to re-tell the story of Scripture in a more beautiful and Christ-centered way, the way Jesus did.

Then, when they reached Emmaus, Jesus decided to act as if He was continuing on the road, just to see if they were curious enough, awake enough, hungry enough to know more about who He was.

So, He waited. Finally the words came ... "stay with us," they said. "It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." It was hospitality to a stranger that became ... the game changer.

Jesus demonstrated a kind of radical hospitality. Jesus accepted their offer. Then He, the stranger, the guest, did something really out of the ordinary.

Jesus the guest started acting like the host. When they sat at the table, Jesus took the bread and began giving thanks.

This may mean nothing to us since we do not really have common meal protocols. But in Jewish culture, the host always says the blessing. The guest never does.

Yet, here was this stranger talking as if the Scriptures were all about Him, and acting as if the table and the meal were His to bless.

Luke recorded this action in a deliberate way, using the same set and sequence as the Passover ... the last time Jesus took bread ... and the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus "took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30).

And then the very next thing Luke tells us in verse 31 is that their "eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus".

In an age when belief is contested, when religion is a private matter with little bearing on real life it seems, the church needs to recover the art of radical hospitality.

But this is a kind of hospitality that is more than making our sacred spaces ready for others; it is a kind of hospitality that we exhibit by showing up in someone else's space with a witness of openness.

We have to offer radical hospitality. Like Jesus acting as host of a meal that was not His, we can find a way to reach out to those in the world, and stand in the midst of their questions and pain, their disappointments and fear. We can take bread, bless it, break it, and give it to them.

We ourselves can become the bread that is blessed, broken, and given for them, for their lives

... yes, even for the life of the world.

What does it mean to be 'given'? So far we have heard that to be given is first to be motivated out of love for Jesus. Then, to be given is also to live for the life of the world. Finally, to be given is to continue the circle of grace.

There is a kind of cycle to given-ness, wouldn't you agree? How about the truth of the saying ... giving begets more giving (begets is a word meaning causes, creates, or affects)?

The self-giving of God generates our self-giving to others. It seems to be this way by God's design. But does this make God's giving not quite pure? Does a true gift need to be one with NO EXPECTATION of return?

To Western minds, this seems silly at best, and perhaps coercive at worst. Is it just being manipulative? Why give to get? Shouldn't you give with no strings attached?

But this is a failure to comprehend the way reciprocity works. Reciprocity is not giving to get. It is a way to reinforce a relationship.

Actually, we discover this early in life. If a friend lets you borrow a toy, you feel you should let that friend have a turn with yours. If you get invited to a friend's birthday party, you will probably give an invitation to your party as well. Returning the favor seems to be a social instinct.

In the Old Testament, love for one's neighbor was a way to demonstrate one's love for God. If God showered His blessings on your crop or livestock, giving you abundance, you demonstrated thanks to God by caring for those who had less.

The care of the poor was a way to return God's blessings to Him. Proverbs 19:17 says, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed".

This was why Jesus could say, generations later, that "as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matthew 25:45).

At the heart of the gospel is grace, a gift that provokes giving. God is gracious. He gives good gifts, even to those who do not deserve it.

And those who receive God's good gifts are to return them UPWARD in praise and OUTWARD in service.

Grace follows the pattern of reciprocity common to gift giving in the ancient world, but with two key differences. First, God's grace is given to the UNWORTHY. No one is fit to receive what God has lavished on us.

Second, God's grace is meant to generate reciprocity in a wider circle, benefiting even those who are outside. Grace begets grace. Giving begets giving. Or as Jesus said in Matthew 10:8, "Freely you received, freely give".

The given-ness of Jesus, the bread of life, makes our given-ness as the church, the body of Christ, possible.

And so the church ... the community formed by the given-ness of Christ ... are a people given by Jesus for one another and for the sake of the world.

The generosity of God is meant to form a generous community. The great gift of God makes us a given people.

So, in view of God's mercy, we must offer ourselves to Him today and every day.

Let Jesus send us into the world as the Father sent Him.

Let's ask Jesus to give us for the life of the world ... then, we are to never look back. Amen