

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 11, 2024. Based on Ephesians 4:25-5:2 and John 6:35, 41-51.

“We receive the Bread of Jesus and become the Bread of Jesus to others”

The Olympics come to a close today. It was amazing watching world records broken and amazing acts of sportsmanship. We saw disqualifications and medals given and then taken away. It's hard for me not to compare our journeys of faith to the metaphor of a race, because we find that in the New Testament. 2 Timothy 4:7 says, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. You might hear this at a funeral. With our faith journey, we don't receive a medal that gets stored somewhere, we receive a crown of righteousness, the promise of heaven that will never wear out or get lost. As we run the race, we will continue to be trained in the kingdom of God. We will continue to grow into our baptismal identity our whole life long. In the meantime, however, we need to be fed and nourished with God's Word, Holy Communion, being in community with each other, and serving one another.

What feeds your faith? Worship, music, serving, studying scripture, visiting the saints. Whenever I gather in community with other Christians or serve others, I am fed. I am the one who is ministered to. I got to serve at vacation Bible school among 60 kids and with other amazing volunteers this week. I got to see lightbulbs go off in kids heads as they heard the story of God going with them through the ups and downs of life. That they can place their trust in God always. I asked the kids, what was your favorite part of VBS... keep in mind, I played and led music. But many of them said snack. Snack is important. Campfire trail mix. Smore ingredients. Our basic needs need to be met first.

I also got to serve a meal at the Pillars adult shelter with 5 others people from our church, Rich Garman, Cindy Palm, Colleen Pillar, Patti Konkell, and Kevin Hilligas. I feel most alive when I serve others. It takes the focus off me for a minute as I encounter Jesus in the face of those I met.

In our Gospel, Jesus says, I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Jesus can fill our deepest spiritual hunger and thirst. We heard today that the bread Jesus gives to the world is his flesh. He gave of himself, even to the point of death on a cross.

This might also make you think of Holy Communion where you receive the body and blood of Jesus for forgiveness of sins. When we receive that meal, we should be changed. We pray in our offering prayer, “Make us what we receive here, your body for the life of the world.” Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church becomes Jesus’ body in the world today. We become bread for others.

What does that look like... being bread for others. Our Ephesians text gives us a clue. After we know how much God loves us and after we say I believe, our lives should change. This section in my NRSV Bible is called Rules for the new life... the new life in Christ.

It involves speaking the truth to our neighbors because we are members of each other. It says, its OK to be angry, but don’t let your anger lead to sin. And do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing and work honestly so you can pay your bills and share something with the needy. And here is a favorite in our household. Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building others up. Our words can lift others up or hurt them. Our country needs this lesson today. Put away all bitterness, wrath and anger, wrangling and slander together with all malice and be kind to one another.

I love it when the Bible is clear. What you say matters and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us. Amen

Speaking of basic needs. In our first lesson, the prophet Elijah just won a contest against 450 prophets of Baal (canannite god of storm and rain). Elijah basically said you can't worship the God of Israel and Baal. Elijah challenged them to a cook off, if you will, where they each had to cut up a bull, put it on an altar and call down fire or lightning from their god. The Baal's lost... no fire came. Elijah was so confident in his God that he had servants pour water all over his offering, and he even made a mote around it, and when he called down fire everything was consumed and the water evaporated. Then Elijah had all the prophets of Baal killed... which is disturbing.

Elijah is now fleeing from Queen JeZabel King Ahab's wife who wants Elijah dead. Elijah won an earthly contest, and yet is now feeling empty and alone, sitting under a solitary broom tree. He wants to give up. He asks God to take his life for he is no better than his ancestors... who killed the cannanites, jebusites, perizites and so on when they entered the promised land. Was Elijah feeling remorse for what he had done? God sent an angel who baked him some fresh bread and provided a jar of water for Elijah. The angels said Get up and eat. This happened again and Elijah had enough strength for his journey in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights.

If we think about it, we have people in our lives who have been bread to us. Who have taught us the faith or encouraged us. Who have showed up to serve. Sent cards. Shared music. Fed us. Brought us to church. Taught us to serve.

Joyce Rupp