

A Eucharistic Life: Take, Bless, Break, Give
Luke 9:10-17; I Corinthians 11:23-26
October 7, 2007

Imagine walking into a bakery or a home to be greeted by the smell of fresh-baked bread. Its rich aroma causes you to pause and simply savor the moment. As you breathe in the fragrance, a feeling of warmth embraces you. Your mouth waters for a fresh slice of warm bread topped with melting butter. It feels like you are back home in Grandma's kitchen, ready to break a fresh loaf of bread with those you love.

This morning we gather here in God's home. We have been drawn here by our need for love and by our desire to share life with others. We gather in the fragrance of God's love and we are held in the loving embrace of our Lord. The bread of life has been prepared for us, that we might eat it with joy and thanksgiving and receive the blessings and nourishment it provides.

This day is significant in that we come to feast at the Lord's table with Protestant Christians around the world. In United Methodist circles we tend to call the meal remembering Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples "Holy Communion." The word communion suggests a relationship of intimacy with God and our sisters and brothers in Christ. Another common name for the meal is the Eucharist, from the Latin meaning "thanksgiving." Communion or Eucharist is a meal remembering and offering our thanks for God's gifts to us, especially the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the drama of communion, there is a pattern of actions that is instructive to our life as disciples of Jesus. The Bible tells us that at the meals Jesus hosts, He takes the bread, blesses or gives thanks to God, breaks the bread, and gives it to his disciples to eat. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul instructs the church to offer communion using these same actions: take the bread, bless the bread, break the bread, and give it to one another.

Take, bless, break, give: these are the movements of Holy Communion. They are the actions of Jesus' life. They are a pattern for our lives as disciples of Jesus.

First is take. Jesus takes the bread. Jesus takes the life and ministry given him by God. He receives all that God gives to him, the joys and the challenges of ministry. We are invited to take the gifts God offers to us. God is both the Source of life and a Presence throughout life, providing a foundation of values for our actions and relationships. God works in all the

experiences of life, not necessarily causing them, but enabling us to grow and learn from our experiences. The experiences of life are all part of the process of becoming the people God has created us to be. God gives us grace, so that when we stumble and fall, we are forgiven and set aright to move forward once again. The gifts of God are given us for our wholeness and our well-being.

We do indeed take what God gives us. Sometimes we take God's gifts for granted. We think that we are entitled to them and that we just plain deserve them. Rather than receiving God's gifts selfishly, we are called to receive God's blessings with an awareness that they are indeed gifts of God. In order to accept them with reverence, we need to get outside of ourselves to be still, to reflect, to listen, to pay attention, and to recognize all that we indeed have been given.

I like to think of each new day as a gift from God, wrapped in paper so that the present within the package will be discovered as I move through the day. As I tend to the needs of my body, I am aware of the miracle of life and health. While preparing and eating meals with family, colleagues or friends, I am conscious of the value and meaning that relationships add to my life. Moving outside to go about the activities of the day, I am struck at the wonders of the natural world, the variety of creatures that inhabit it, the beauty of a flower or the antics of a squirrel. Driving in the community or listening to the radio or reading a book, I marvel at the talents of human beings and the marvelous ways in which we use our talents and intellect to enrich life. When I am consciously aware of life as a gift, I am less likely to take life for granted, but rather to receive life as a gift from God.

We take, then we bless. The most appropriate response to God's gift of life is gratitude. The awareness of life's blessings evokes thanksgiving. We acknowledge that the goodness and generosity bestowed upon us is from God. We respond to life by blessing God, by praising God. Giving thanks is the second movement in the life of a disciple.

That's what Jesus does. He blesses the bread. He gives thanks to God. Jesus blesses his life by consecrating himself and his work to God. Jesus acknowledges God's gift of grace in his life with gratitude.

Take. Bless. Break. Jesus breaks the bread, for unless bread is broken, it cannot be shared. In his death, Jesus' body is broken in the horrible act of crucifixion. In the breaking of his body, Jesus shares with us the brokenness of our lives.

Life breaks us. Things happen that hurt us, that cause us pain: failure, fear, frustration, discontent, confusion, divorce, death, loneliness, illness, accidents. No life is free of suffering. Brokenness is part of the journey of life.

We tend to view brokenness as an unwelcome intrusion. There can, however, come a time in which we befriend our brokenness, learn from it, and grow because of it. Everything we experience in life can be part of our journey into the full stature of Christ. God's blessing can even touch our brokenness, offering healing and new life. We grow to receive even the brokenness of life with thanksgiving.

Henri Nouwen tells of a scene from Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* (a musical work written in memory of John F. Kennedy). Toward the end of this work, the priest, richly dressed in splendid liturgical vestments, is lifted up by his people. He towers high above the adoring crowd, carrying in his hands a glass chalice. Suddenly the human pyramid collapses, and the priest comes tumbling down. His vestments are ripped off, and his glass chalice falls to the ground and is shattered. As he walks slowly through the debris of his former glory—barefoot, wearing only blue jeans and a t-shirt—children's voices are heard singing, "Laude, laude, laude"—"praise, praise, praise." Suddenly the priest notices the broken chalice. He looks at it for a long time and then, haltingly, he says, "I never realized that broken glass could shine so brightly."¹

Take. Bless. Break. The bread is broken that it might be shared. Jesus is broken that God might share in our brokenness.

Give. Jesus gives the bread to his disciples to eat. Jesus' body, broken on the cross, is given as an expression of solidarity with all who suffer and long to rise to new life. Out of our brokenness arises compassion, empathy, and love meant for giving.

All that we receive from God is not simply for our own enjoyment or benefit. We receive in order to share with others. We are chosen so that we can life for others. Our greatest fulfillment in life is found in giving ourselves to others.

Take. Bless. Break. Give. Four actions of the communion meal. Four movements in the lives of disciples of Jesus. Communion need not be a monthly experience with the symbolic bread and cup. Communion can be an everyday experience of the presence of God. Indeed, it is a way of living for disciples of Jesus.

We take the gifts of life, consciously aware of the Giver, our God.

We bless the gifts, offering thanks for the gifts and praise to the Maker.

We are broken in life, broken yet not destroyed, broken and healed, broken and raised to new life, broken to shine with the glory of God.

We give, sharing God's gifts with others. Perhaps our greatest expression of gratitude is in giving the gift away.

Take. Bless. Break. Give. These are the actions of a Eucharistic life, a life lived in thanksgiving to God. May these four movements mark our lives as disciples of Jesus. May they become daily acts, drawing us into closer communion with God and with one another.

¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), pp. 82-83.

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