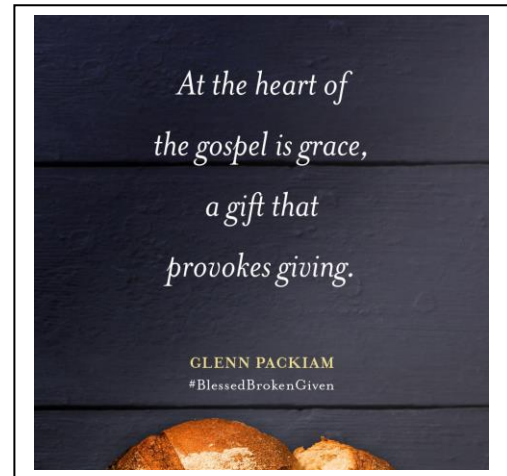


Sunday 29 October 2023.

Theme: GIVEN.

**Scripture: Luke 24:30-32 and
John 21:15-18.**

**This series is about seeing our lives
as bread that Jesus takes in His
hands, blesses, breaks, and gives for
the life of the world.**



Over the past few weeks, we talked about how difficult it is to imagine our ordinary, common lives being *blessed* and sacred and holy. And we explored how our sin and our suffering make it feel like our *brokenness* disqualifies us from having something to offer. Yet when we surrender our story to Jesus, we are blessed by having our identity recovered and restored, and our brokenness becomes openness to God's grace. There is one more word in the series – given.

What if you feel like you have nothing to give? Maybe you think *purpose* is connected to *value*. If you are “just” an ordinary Christian, is there really anything to give from your life? Let's explore this question together.

In Luke's gospel we read that 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 us, and not even just the church.

What does it mean to be 'given'? There are several layers of this. I want to highlight three today.

1. To be given is to be spent out of love for Jesus.

Why do we allow our lives to be given for another? The obvious answer is love. But what do we love to become given? The answer again seems obvious: the person you are serving, the one to whom you are given. If your life is to be given for your family, then it is the love for your family that leads you to that place. If your life is to be given in service of the poor, then it is the love for the poor that leads to that givenness.

But this is not enough to carry us through the dark nights and the lonely hours. It won't push us through the pain and the hurt we've experienced from the very ones we were trying to help. This is what happened to the apostle Peter in John's gospel reading. After the Resurrection, Peter returned to fishing.

Think about it: He ran to the tomb. He saw that it was empty. He was with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them. He may have been there when Thomas placed his hands on Jesus's scars. And still he went back to his old livelihood.

Maybe Peter felt he had lost it all that night when he denied knowing Jesus, or he was too confused about what the Resurrection really meant. Maybe Peter was too covered in shame for it to matter. He might as well try to just live a quiet life, a smaller story.

But John describes 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 recognized Him. “It is the Lord,” John said to Peter. 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.

The main point is that Jesus was reinstating Peter. He was reaffirming Peter’s purpose, calling, and destiny. The three repetitions of the question are meant to correspond to Peter’s threefold denial. In this restorative, call-renewing conversation, Jesus asked Peter, simply, repetitively, and piercingly, **“Do you love *me?*”**

Not “Do you love the sheep?” Not “Do you love the food?” Meaning “My teachings.” Not “Do you love yourself?” Not “Do you love purpose and mission?” **The 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 the 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, to be given, and not just a recipient."

It isn't the love of being given that leads to our givenness. It isn't the love of a purpose that can sustain us. In the end that was 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, but this 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 out of love for Him. And when we surrender, we find ourselves not needing to beg any longer. Our surrender makes us 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.

2. To be given is 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.” 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. 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 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

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 shift, Jesus showed them how the Scriptures spoke of *Him*. We must find a way to tell the world its own story, to re-tell the story of Scripture in a more beautiful and Christ-centered way, the way Jesus did.

When they reached Emmaus, Jesus decided to act as if He was continuing on ahead, just to see if they were curious enough, awake enough, hungry enough to know more about who He was. He waited. “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 Jesus, the guest started acting like the host. When they sat at the table, Jesus took the bread and began giving thanks. In Jewish culture, the host always says the blessing, the guest never does. Yet here was this strange 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”. And then the very next thing Luke tells us is that their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

The church needs to recover the art of radical hospitality, 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 posture 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 amid 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.

3. To be given is to continue the circle of grace.

There is a kind of cycle to given-ness. Giving begets more giving.

The self-giving of God generates our own self-giving to others. It seems to be this way by God’s design. Does a true gift need to be one with no expectation of return? We may think this is coercive, manipulative, to give to get. But this is a failure to comprehend the way giving works. Giving is a way to reinforce a relationship.

In the Old Testament, if God has 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. “Whoever is generous to the

poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed,” says Proverbs 19:17. This was why Jesus could say, in Matthew 25:45, generations later, that “as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

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. God’s grace is given to the *unworthy*. No one is fit to receive what God has lavished on us. God’s grace is meant to beget grace and giving. As Jesus said, “Freely you received, freely give.”

The givenness of Jesus, the bread of life, makes our givenness as the church, the body of Christ, possible. 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, will you offer yourself to Him today?

Will you let Jesus send you into the world as the Father sent Him?

Will you ask Him to *give* you for the life of the world?