

Chosen, Blessed, Broken, and Given

MJCF August 8, 2021

Matthew 26:26-29, 1 Peter 2:9-10

The other day, I heard a podcast by Henri Nouwen, a Dutch Catholic priest who has taught and influenced many Christians, helping them to see Jesus Christ in new ways. He presents an interpretation of the Lord's Supper, and since we are planning to celebrate that today, I think it will help us think of the meaning as we participate.

At that final meal with his disciples, before his crucifixion, Jesus "broke bread." He explains that the bread represents his body (which would be "broken" at his death). Later, after Jesus' resurrection there's the story where two disciples encounter him on the road to Emmaus. They don't recognize him at first, and it is only after they eat with him that they recognize him. In Luke 24, verse 35 it says that Jesus "had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread." There is an important connection between Jesus, and "the breaking of the bread." One other story happens earlier. Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 people in the wilderness, with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. Not long after that, 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." The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 represents much more than satisfying people's physical hunger. We hunger spiritually as well. Jesus satisfies this deep longing, affecting our entire life.

When we celebrate communion, we remember Jesus' broken body and shed blood represented by the bread and juice. We also remember that Jesus sustains us in our lives today. We also are reminded how we are to follow, giving of ourselves as Jesus gave himself. Nouwen describes 4 key points based on Matthew 26, verse 26, "While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body...". Jesus took the bread, he blessed it, broke it, and he gave it to the disciples. The bread represents Jesus who was "taken" (or "chosen") by God, he was "blessed" by God, "broken" in his crucifixion, and "given" for all people. In the same way, we are all "chosen", "blessed", "broken", and "given" for others. Let's look at each of these separately.

When Jesus took the bread it could represent being chosen. Jesus was the chosen one. In Isaiah 42, verse 1 God says, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." Later, these words are said to be about Jesus, (in Matthew 12). We are also chosen. In the Bible, we read how God chose Abraham to become the father of many nations. His descendants became the Israelites, God's chosen people. Then, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this aspect of being chosen spread to all people. "You are a chosen race..." as 1 Peter 2:9 tells us. We all now belong to God. We are all chosen – not like being chosen to be on an Olympic team, where some are chosen and others not chosen. We are chosen in the sense that we are all unique. God created us with different talents and abilities. In 1st Corinthians 12, Paul says that we are given different gifts, and we are all members of one body, the church. Each person has a unique role to fulfill. Of course, we are not perfect in our following God's leading, but it's amazing to think that there are some purposes in your life where God is leading you to do something, and no one else but you fits for that purpose. No one is useless.

As Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship we have a unique role. We are a small group, but that can sometimes be an advantage in that we can make decisions quickly, as compared to a large church where they need to decide everything a year ahead of time. We are unique in that we are a Japanese speaking group, in Canada. We have children and can relate to others who have children. Some churches have no children. We are an international group, welcoming Korean, Japanese, and English speakers, and people of other cultures. Some churches have everyone from the same area. As a Mennonite church, we have a unique theology that emphasises following Jesus, the importance of community, and peace. Of course, other churches also have similar characteristics, but here at MJCF we have a unique role to play in our time and place. We also have a rich tradition of faithful people

who have gone before us. Early Anabaptist/Mennonites were persecuted because of their faith in believer's baptism, and separating church and state politics. We are chosen by God, as individuals, and as a church.

So, coming back to our four words, Jesus took or chose the bread, and next, he blessed it. Words of blessing before we eat are times when we bless God, we thank God for providing us with food. The blessing, could be words of affirmation. When Jesus was baptised, God's voice came from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:17) Jesus was blessed, and we are also blessed by God. Paul says this in Ephesians 1, chapter 3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." Through Jesus, God has brought us out of darkness into the light of his love and grace. We are blessed in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5, verse 8).

At MJCF, we are small, but we have experienced God's blessings. In the past few years, there have been many changes, but God has always sent new people, even as others returned to Japan. As we learn to rely on God we've seen how God's Spirit continues to sustain us. . As we learn more and more how much God loves us we become stronger. Nothing we do can make God love us more, and nothing we do can make God love us less. Our fears dissolve as we realise that God is walking with us, leading us. We then become motivated to live for others, and make a difference in our world around us. Because God loves the world, we also will grow in love for others.

This brings us to the 3rd word. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it and then breaks it. This represents Jesus' body, which is "broken" for us, as he endures torture and being nailed to a cross. In the book of Isaiah, Jesus is described as a suffering servant. In chapter 53, verse 5, Isaiah says, "...he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his wounds we are healed." It's a mystery how God can take the worst possible thing and make it into something good. In our lives, we sometimes have a terrible experience, or possibly unbearable suffering. We all have times when we feel weak, times when we feel like nothing works. And yet, it's at our low points, the times when we feel powerless and out of control, that we have a chance to see the power of God. In Matthew 5, starting in verse 11, Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." In our difficulties and woundedness, we can more easily understand and care for others around us who have their own wounds.

We may feel like we're too small, or we may feel like we're lacking in other areas. We may feel broken and overwhelmed because our world seems out of control all around us. Yet, Jesus describes his ministry with words from the prophet, Isaiah, chapter 61, "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor..." Somehow, in our pain and weakness, we have an opportunity to experience God's strength and blessing in a much deeper way than when everything is going OK.

So, we are chosen, blessed, and broken. The final thing Jesus did with the bread was to give it to the disciples. In a similar way God gave Jesus to us. "For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3, verse 16) God is a generous giver. We are also called to be givers. We've been chosen, blessed, and even in our brokenness been empowered by God to give to others. Our passage from 1st Peter says that we have been chosen and have received mercy for a purpose, "in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." At MJCF, we have a mission to share the good news of Jesus with people around us. There is a deep joy in knowing we have a unique role, that we are loved by God, and that our brokenness is not a weakness, but an opportunity to see the strength of God at work in our own lives. The good news is not, "If you follow

God, get strong in learning God's laws, and do lots of good things you will go to heaven, and if you do bad, you'll go to hell." How is that good news? We all have a mix of good and bad within us. We all have weaknesses and sin. We may often sense our own brokenness. The good news is that we are chosen by God, we're blessed and loved, and in our brokenness God can work in and through us that others may be blessed. Let's pray.

O Lord, as we celebrate communion today, nourish us with your spirit. May we then share your blessing with those around us, through Christ our Lord, Amen.