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The Bread that Gives Life Eternal

John 6:51-58

Life is a one-time opportunity given us in this world. Each moment which passes can never be returned back to us. Therefore, life is a very precious affair and a serious matter. We have to manage this time and life that we are living well. When we were children, we were asked to study hard by parents, while we mostly wanted to play and have as much fun as possible with friends. If we had chosen to instead only to play and spend our time having fun rather than going to school and studying, later we would have regretted the choice. Our choices in life are important for a meaningful life.

When I was dating Sun, her parents and her family (all except younger sister), were not happy about us because I was a seminary student, who would become a minister. At that time, a life of minister was not recommendable. Most ministers were poor, and the job was not considered particularly socially admirable. Even though her parents were devoted Christians and active members in church, they didn't want give their daughter to a poor minister..

But Sun chose her spouse well, I happen to think, with support from her sister. Her sister was a junior high school student who was in one of my classes which I taught in the church. The girl loved me and recommended her sister, Sun, to marry me. She eventually became a minister's wife herself, later in life.

A life is a series of choice, of decision-making and of purposeful direction. But, for those who believe in God, our life will not be finished or ended in this world, but we have faith that it will be continued eternally. We have another world that we are hoping for after death.

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In the point of view of the world, Jesus' life as a human being was one with a miserable and unhappy ending. He had lived as a homeless person, having nothing, no fun, and found his life ended abruptly, violently-a short and terrible life. Nobody wants to have that kind of life. But Jesus came to us as redeemer and lived for us an example of the meaningful life for the people of God. It is foolish for us to believe that we are owner of our lives. The owner of life is not me but the Creator. We believe that we will have everlasting life after death by the grace of Jesus Christ, the eternal life giver. That is the Christian philosophy and view of the world.

Today's scripture reading, John 6:51-58, is a story of Jesus who taught about the bread of life. He told the people that He had the bread of life eternal.. If anyone today could bake bread that could extend life even a little, that person would be the greatest business person in the world. Everybody is concerned about and looks for a life as long as possible. Health food and organic foods are one of the top interests among people today.

Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." And he added his saying, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus' teaching was not easy. Rather, it was too hard to understand. When Jesus said "I'm the bread of life," many people didn't understand it. At that point, many disciples left him. From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. This saying was too hard for them. They thought He had gone mad. Even His inner core of disciples murmured about this saying, but while they did not understand it, they did not leave. They knew Jesus had the words of life. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?" You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68)

Jesus' words were very hard. He used to use parable rather than straight explanation when he taught about the kingdom of God because often there were twofold reasons in his saying: For those who have ears to listen, His words are to be understood, and for those who have not ears to listen, His words may not be understood. The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but to others I speak in parable so that, "though seeing, they may not see, though hearing, they may not understand." (Luke 8:9-10)

Reading the Bible is like eating whole fish. I liken the process of eating whole fish. When you travel to the Holy Land and visit the Sea of Galilee you will have chance to taste the fish called Peter fish" The Peter fish was very tasty but there were too many tiny bones. Fish is very tasty and it is good for the health, 'brain food," one must eat that fish slowly, carefully and wisely so as to find bones and separate them out before swallowing each bite. Jesus' teaching cannot be understood literally or spontaneously. Without faith, we can not approach to the teaching of Jesus.

What does it mean that Jesus is the bread of life eternal? When Christianity was introduced to Korea about one hundred some years ago, many people misunderstood Christian faith as cannibalism because they understood Holy Communion literally: "This is my body and this is my blood; eat and drink it."

A Semitic poet wrote;
Behind of the loaf is the snowy flour;
Behind of the flour, the mill
Behind of the mill is the wheat and the sower,
And the Sun,
And the Father's a will.

This poem sees the Father's will behind a loaf of bread.

Reflecting on the old story of Moses' time when the people ate in the desert, Jesus introduced himself to the people as "manna," the bread from heaven. In Hebrew, "manna" meant literally, "What is it?" food from heaven. Jesus said of himself that he is the true manna. Now in what way was Jesus Christ the true bread of life?

When we read the scripture regarding Jesus' flesh and blood as the food for eternal life, we might conclude quickly – "Aha! Probably, he meant the Communion we are taking on Sunday." That is good guess. But, we need to understand more deeply behind His saying about His flesh and blood. It is not only the material elements of Communion to which Jesus referred, but also spiritual significance which under-girds Communion.

Do you have a loaf of bread in your luggage when you feel hungry, spiritually, to eat and share with your friends who are also hungry in spirit? Now, in what way was Jesus Christ the true bread of life? I would like to interpret the bread of life in three points.

First of all, Jesus is the living word of God and in that sense Jesus is the true bread of life. The word of God encourages us in every day. There are power and wisdom and up-lifting encouragement in the word of God. Also, there is God's promise in God's word.

It's so easy to become discouraged in today's world. There are so many pressures, stresses, deadlines, burdens, problems, and disappointments. Life can be so complicated and so demanding. The truth is that we all need encouragement from time to time. We need someone to say, "I love you" and "I believe you." The word 'encourage' literally means "to put the heart in," and the word discourage means "to tear the heart out." The good news of our Christian faith is that our Lord is a God of encouragement by His word and His living word, Jesus Christ.

When the world threatens to rip out our hearts, God is there for us with grace to encourage us, to put the heart back into us, to relight the spark, to give us new life. So, when we taste the bread and the cup, we will taste also the grace of God's encouraging love.

Second, Jesus came to this world to reconnect the broken relationship between humans and God. This is the will of God and in that sense Jesus is the true bread of life.

Some years ago, a noted American psychologist made a documentary film about an orphanage in South America. The orphanage was well-run. The physical needs of the children were well met. The workers were well trained and competent. But the home was greatly understaffed. There were 97 babies. The staff had time only to feed, clothe, and bathe the children. There was simply no time to hold them or play with them, no time to sing to them or talk to them.. Their physical needs were routinely met- and then the children were left alone. The isolation and loneliness proved to be destructive, even fatal. In the first year, 27 died; the second year, 7 more deaths. Even those who did survive showed grave symptoms of abnormality and the inability to relate meaningfully to others. The lack of love was the culprit. On the conclusion of this film was that we could not live by bread alone.

About forty years ago there was an accident when a mining pit of coal collapsed in Korea. In the mining pit there was one person who remained alive in the collapsed pit. It was so deep that it took twenty one days to rescue him. Then, he was finally rescued. There was no water and no food in the collapsed mining pit. But, there was one thing which kept him alive. It was a phone line. This phone line to the outside of the pit helped him to hope that he can be patient, and to give him the will to live.

The covenant of the Lord, through the bread and the cup, reconnects relationship between God and us, offering us eternal salvation.

Lastly, Jesus finished his work and mission that God sent him to finish. Ultimately, to carry a cross for the people was the work and his mission that God sent him to do and finish. Jesus, the bread of life, is word, the covenantal relationship, and the mission of God. In fact, we are the people of God who are redeemed, empowered, and commissioned to participate in God's business by God.

What's God's business? Through the participation in God's business, we may taste the goodness of God. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work." Just before he took the cross he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." When we follow His commandment, we will meet the real meaning of life, and mission to take, which is the food Jesus offered us.

Theologically speaking, Jesus was the embodiment of Father's word, will and work, fulfilling these three required the crucifixion of His flesh. He brought it to perfect obedience to the Father's will. God's will is also the will we should follow in our life.

There is story about a man who had a huge boulder in his front yard. He grew weary of this big, unattractive stone in the center of his lawn, so he decided to take advantage of it and turn it into an object of art. He went to work on it with a hammer and chisel, and chipped away at the huge boulder until it became a beautiful stone elephant. When he finished, it was gorgeous, breathtaking.

His neighbor was surprised that he made an elephant out of an unattractive stone and asked him how he could make it. He said, "Everything in it that looked not like elephant, I chopped out." Everything that we think is not the will of God, chip it away. Then, the work of God will be accomplished by our labor. This is the taste of bread that Jesus offered us.

Some in our community who missed a tasting the Korean pear asked me about the Korean pear – what it taste like, so I tried to explain how it is different from the pear which grow in America: more juice, different texture, bigger and so forth. But, I realize that is a very inadequate introduction. Finally, I said to her, "You will taste and see t how it is different when the time comes that I can give it to you." All I can do is give her a Korean pear and let her taste it for herself.

Experience is better than any explanation. The psalmist said, "Taste and see that Lord is good." During Communion, when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we should taste the bread and cup, tasting how gracious is the taste of God's love. Have you tasted God's redeeming love? Have you tasted God's forgiving love? Have you tasted God's encouraging love? Have you tasted God's transforming love with us? Those tastes are to be tasted in affirming faith through the covenant of Jesus, the bread and the cup.