

1Cor. 15:1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain.

Take, Bless, Break, Give

1 Cor. 15:1-10a

On Maundy Thursday evening, we heard Mark's account of the the Last Supper and these four verbs stood out: "...he *took* the bread, and after *blessing* it, he *broke* it and *gave* it to them..." We also discovered that those four verbs: take, bless, break, and give, appear together in meal after meal, gospel after gospel. Matthew says, "While they were eating, Jesus *took* a loaf of bread, and after *blessing* it he *broke* it, *gave* it to the disciples." Luke says, "Then he *took* a loaf of bread, and when he had *given thanks*, he *broke* it and *gave* it to them."

Matthew recalls of the feeding of the five thousand saying that Jesus "Ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. *Taking* the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven, and *blessed* and *broke* the loaves, and *gave* them to the disciples, and the disciples *gave* them to the crowds. Even in the midst of a storm, the book of Acts says that Paul, aboard a ship, *takes* bread, *blesses* (gives thanks for) it, *breaks* and begins to eat, *giving* courage to the rest onboard the ship.

Take. Bless. Break. Give.

They are not only the verbs of the Last Supper, or words of institution before the Sacrament, they are the verbs of life. The verbs of faith.

Jesus lived these verbs, and as I meditated on them, I realized that these are the verbs we are to live by, as well.

Take. Bless. Break. Give.

The next four Sundays we will take a deeper look at each of them, and what it means to live these four verbs, and today we begin with the verb, "Take."

As Paul says in this great summary of the Gospel in our scripture reading, this is a gospel message we have ***received***. It is not something we create or initiate. We are always ***responders***, never initiators. We can only take what has already been done for us and offered to us.

Karl Barth talks about Jesus being ***God's yes to humanity***, which I find very meaningful. In his death on the cross, Jesus took God's "no" for our sins upon himself: the reason God would have for saying no to us. In taking God's "no" upon himself, God has freely opened the way to say "yes" to us, in spite of the fact that we do not deserve a "yes" from God – yes to eternal life; yes to freedom from the consequences of our sin; yes to inclusion in God's ultimate salvation.

You've heard me quote Barth's assertion that the only appropriate response to God's grace is our gratitude. Another way of saying that is that the only appropriate response to God's "yes" is our "yes" in receiving this Good News.

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his followers, saying, "Take..." There is a taking on our parts, as well.

Not everyone says "Yes" to God's yes. Not everyone accepts, takes, the grace that is offered in Jesus Christ. As I thought about it, here are some reasons why we don't take. You may come up with others, but here are the reasons I find most common.

1. Taking requires a commitment, and commitment is something that we have a hard time with today.
 - a. Marriage – the rate of divorce is down, but the main reason is fewer people are getting married. Fewer people see the value in making such a commitment to another person.
 - b. Career: millennials are predicted to change careers over a dozen times.
 - c. We want to reserve right to change our minds, keep our options open.
 - d. And yet, there are moments in our lives where we can only experience true freedom if we willingly bind ourselves to something or someone. This is the great mystery of marriage: freely and willingly binding myself to another person enables me to know a level of joy and freedom that cannot be known when I insist on being my own person.

Saying yes, taking this Gospel Bread requires saying no to certain things in order to say yes to other things. It requires making a commitment to live out that yes in our decisions and chooses, our relationships, our habits, our lives.

2. Accepting the Good News also requires believing the good news is true. It requires *faith* – accepting something that cannot be proven. I find this to be most common among those with more education, more exposure to the academic world that has a strong suspicion of a life based on something as nebulous as "faith." Facts and figures, things that can be proven, or just keeping a healthy "objective" distance from religion in general.

Because, once you accept that this gospel message is *true*, then you are faced with the question: “What am I going to do about it?” As long as I can take the stance that it *may* be true, then I don’t have to do anything; I can keep a distance. I don’t have to respond. I know some people who are lifelong agnostics for this very reason: they don’t have to make a commitment; they don’t have to make a response.

3. It requires believing you *need* it. Admitting that I am a sinner, and there’s nothing I can do to stop being a sinner. As Paul says in Romans 6, no matter how hard I try, all the things I don’t want to do are the things I do, and all of the things I have very good intention of doing I actually do. There’s this war going on within myself. The greatest enemy, or the greatest tool of the enemy, is denial – pretending I am not a sinner.

4. Requires believing the good news is true for you, regardless of whether you deserve it. Many people are sure that their lives, their choices, the hurts they have caused disqualify them from God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul understood himself, once God’s grace had been revealed to him, as the greatest of all sinners. He had Jesus’ followers rounded up, arrested, and persecuted. He stood looking on in approval as Stephen, the first Christian martyr was stoned to death. He was on his way to Damascus, Syria, chasing Christians who had escaped this persecution in Jerusalem, to arrest them and haul them back when he was struck down and heard Jesus’ voice asking why he was persecuting Jesus himself. If there was anyone who did not deserve the grace of Christ, it was him. And yet, he said, “By the grace of God, I am what I am.”

May I ask you a question?

If you have not received this grace, accepted this bread of life, why haven’t you?

Do you not believe it is true?

Do you not believe it is true for you?

Do you not believe you need it?

Do you not believe you deserve it?

Do you not want to let go of something, or not want to make the commitment such an acceptance requires?

As Paul tells us, *Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, the twelve, over 500 followers, and, then to Paul himself.*

Jesus *took* the bread, blessed and broke it, then said, “Take.” So Jesus *is* the bread who has been blessed and broken for our sakes. Then he says, “This is the

Good News of eternal life in my name. Take...

Have you?

If not, I invite you to examine your heart, mind and soul to see why.

Then ask yourself, why not take this bread of life?

Why not say yes to Jesus Christ, who is God’s yes to you?