



Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren

Continuing the Work of JesusPeacefully, Simply, Together

March 16, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren in the Diaspora.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Daylight hours are getting longer, COVID cases are decreasing as vaccines are increasing. Praise the Lord! There is a sense of hope in the air as we look forward to celebrating the resurrection of our Lord from the grave on Easter Sunday, April 4.

As COVID cases decline and gathering restrictions ease, I hope more of you will feel comfortable returning to in-person worship while still observing the guidelines of the CDC.

Be sure you return your votes by March 22 for calling Rita Carter as our Pastor of Visitation and Mary Etta Reinhart as our Interim Associate Pastor.

The church board approved the worship schedule for the summer months. Beginning May 30, we will have one combined outdoor service in the grove through the end of August starting at 9:30 with Sunday school following. I hope all our members will feel comfortable worshipping in our beautiful outdoor setting. In case of inclement weather, the service will be held in the sanctuary.

This coming Sunday we will be partaking of communion in both worship services. For those who are worshipping online, have some bread and drink available and you can partake of communion with us in your home setting. Communion will immediately follow the morning sermon which is based upon the words of Jesus: "I Am the Bread of Life" from John 6:22-35.

Additional money has come in from our members through the Mission Stimulus Fund challenge for the Delmas Church of the Brethren in Haiti. \$26,610 was sent to Brethren World Mission from our church for this project. An additional amount of about \$30,000 still needs to be raised to enable the Delmas Church to proceed with acquiring a building for their congregation. Praise God for all who contributed toward this mission outreach opportunity.

With more stimulus checks in the mail to many folks, you might want to consider an additional stimulus gift to Brethren World Mission or toward our own church budget. Thanks for your faithful stewardship. You are a very generous congregation.

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For this week's piece of personal trivia, I would like to share with you that my Kindergarten teacher in Hershey was Arlene Kettering Bucher. Arlene was a distant relative of mine who married Rufus Bucher, II, who some of our older members may have known. He died of drowning shortly after their marriage and Arlene never remarried. Later in life she earned a PhD and joined the faculty of Millersville University in the Special Education Department of which my brother, Dick, was department chair. Arlene died in 2003 and is buried in our church cemetery. How's that for a bit of personal trivia with a connection to Mechanic Grove?

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit". *Romans 15:13*

Bob Kettering, Interim Senior Pastor

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

- I. Continuing with the series of sermons based upon the self-disclosure statements by our Savior, we focus our attention this morning upon the saying of Jesus as found in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.

-once again, in order to understand the significance of this statement, we must first examine the context in which these words occur both from John chapter 6 and from Exodus chapter 16. Let's first look at the Exodus text. Here is my first point: BREAD AS MANNA.

-picture in your mind this sullen and somber scenario from the scriptures in which the children of Israel after 400 years of bondage in Egypt, finally flee from Pharaoh's fetters by miraculously crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, on to the Promised Land of milk and honey under the colorful, charismatic, command of God's servant, Moses.

-this band of believers braves the brutality of the Sinai wilderness only to become discouraged and dismayed by the lack of food and water. The scripture says: "The whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness wandering, saying to them:

'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full. You have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger!'"

- II. Hunger is a terrible thing. Hunger has claimed the lives of millions around the world. Hunger has caused wars and uprisings. Hunger can bring out the worst in us...ask any waitress or parent who is late in getting dinner on the table. Can you imagine the murmuring of the multitude against Moses? A new word has recently emerged when your kids are angry from being hungry. The word is HANGRY...bad moods...short tempers...FEED THEM!

-in the midst of the murmuring to Moses, God miraculously made manna rain upon the multitude and all were fed with this daily bread from heaven throughout the duration of their wilderness experience. Let's turn our attention to the New Testament.

-the sixth chapter of John's Gospel opens with a description of 5000 people gathered around Jesus on the mountainside. As the day wears on, the people begin to get hungry and implore Jesus to feed them as Moses did the people by Mount Sinai. The crowd calls attention to the fact that Moses gave their ancestors bread from heaven to eat. They obviously are recalling the Jewish writings known as the Midrash which states:

"As the first redeemer brought down manna...so will also the last redeemer cause manna to come down."

-in other words; if Jesus is the new Moses, the last redeemer....let him make manna come down from heaven and feed us! Moses did it. Can't Jesus do it too?

- III. Jesus corrects the crowd on two points. First, he reminds them that it was God who sent the manna, the bread from heaven, not Moses. Secondly, Jesus points out that the true gift God's bread provided them was not a full stomach but a new life.

-the 5000 fed by Jesus only perceived the miracle to the satisfaction of their stomachs rather than to the satisfaction of their souls. Jesus came to proclaim free grace and all the people sought was a free meal. Here is my second point: BREAD AS MAIN STAPLE.

-I truly praise God for the massive relief efforts undertaken by the Church of the Brethren over the years which have fed multitudes of starving people around the world. Through Heifer Project, CROP, One Great Hour of Sharing, the Global Food Crises Fund, disaster relief and many special appeals for Central America, Puerto Rico, Sudan, Nigeria and on and on. Mechanic Grove Church has strongly supported all of these Brethren related efforts contributing tens of thousands of dollars over the years. Praise God for your care and concern for the starving masses of our world. You are to be commended as a congregation. Last week you contributed to a special offering to the Global Food Crises Fund. Today you are contributing to One Great Hour of Sharing.

-however, coupled with the feeding of the starving and malnourished people of our world, needs to go a positive proclamation presenting the motivation of our giving...Jesus Christ!

-what good is our giving if we only feed hungry bodies but let starving souls die? What good is it to rescue people from the brink of death without a thought of their eternal destiny? There are plenty of governmental and secular social welfare agencies that send food to starving people.

- IV. The point I am making is this: the best bread which we give needs to be the type that people will partake, and never hunger again! That is what sets us apart from secular hunger relief agencies and efforts; noble though they may be. God bless them!

-the Brethren approach to mission and service is that we are called to share the whole gospel to the whole person; seeking to minister to the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of others. The Church of the Brethren has consistently sought to promote a holistic approach which combines service and evangelism; digging wells in Nigeria and Haiti and sharing the living water; bringing medical help through establishing clinics and hospitals for diseased bodies and spiritual uplift for destitute souls. Educating minds through literacy programs and establishing schools and enlightening their spirits through the teaching and proclamation of the gospel.

-never before in the history of the Church of the Brethren has there been greater mission activity around the world than the present. And the appeal of the Brethren to people around the world is this basic principle of a holistic approach to the gospel that feeds body, mind and spirit.

- V. Several years ago, I was director of the Andrew Center which was the evangelism and church vitality agency of the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonites with our headquarters in Elgin, Illinois. One of the projects of the Andrew Center was to partner with Habitat for Humanity for a housing construction blitz in Long beach, California during Annual Conference. Conference goers could actually spend some time constructing houses during Annual Conference.

-Millard Fuller, the founder and director of Habitat for Humanity, was on hand for the dedication of the houses we built. As often as possible, Millard liked to be on site when a house was completed and take part in a worship service dedicating the house. At the conclusion of those worship services, the new occupants are always presented with the keys of the house and a Bible with Psalm 127:1 marked, which reads: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

-Habitat for Humanity seeks to make the connection between meeting both the physical and spiritual needs of people.

- VI. The problem with the people who had their physical appetites fed by Jesus by the Sea of Galilee, is that they only thought of their physical needs being met. Jesus Christ did not come to earth to be just some saintly Santa Claus. Here is my third point: BREAD AS METAPHOR. Jesus took the focus away from the physical needs to their spiritual hunger and said to the people:

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that you may eat of it and not die.

I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. For the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

- VII. It is true, Jesus met the physical needs of people and we too are called to meet the physical needs of people...feeding the hungry...clothing the ill-clad...visiting the sick...binding up the broken...giving hope to the hopeless and help to the homeless. But the primary mission of Jesus and the primary mission of the church is to satisfy the spiritual hunger of people in our community and world.

-when Jesus proclaimed himself to be the bread of life he is saying that he and only he can satisfy the spiritual hunger and emptiness that comes when a person is not at peace with God. Many people are looking in many places for things to satisfy their appetites, but Christ said to the people gathered around him, as he says to us this morning:

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which the Son of Man will give to you, for on him God has set his seal. I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

VIII. I think we may be able to better understand the full significance of the self-disclosure statement: "I am the bread of life" by considering for a few moments what Christ did NOT say. I heard someone share these examples some time ago. First of all, Christ did not say: "I am the cake of life". I want you all to know that I really like cake; especially chocolate cake and to Millie Groff, I would add Angel Food cake to my list. As a matter of fact, to be perfectly honest and candid with you this morning; I prefer cake to bread. When I was a boy the only thing I enjoyed about wedding receptions, which I thought were boring, was eating a piece of wedding cake. The fact of the matter is that everyone can live without cake. But in Jesus' day you could not live very well without bread.

-it was the staple, essential, most basic food among the Jews in Palestine. No matter how poor the family, every Jewish family was able to eat bread! Cake is a luxury in life; bread was an essential of life.

IX. Someone asked me how you can tell if you live in central Pennsylvania? When they predict one inch of snow, the grocery stores immediately sell out of toilet paper, milk and bread. You smile...but you know it's true. Bread continues to remain as one of the most basic parts of our diet. What would a Big Mac be without the bun? Devoid of the little nutrition it already lacks!

-what Jesus was saying here in John chapter 6 is: "That as bread is necessary to sustain the body; so I am essential to sustain the soul. I am the bread of life." Jesus is not a luxury in life; he is not a frill in living; he is not the extra of life but he is the essential of life. He is necessary for our spiritual growth. Jesus said:

"Truly, truly I say to you, 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 them up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed."

-the great hymn writer, Charles Wesley, expressed it this way: "Thou, O Christ art all I need, more than all, in Thee I find." Jesus Christ is the living bread that feeds our souls. The symbol of Jesus as the bread of life is a powerful metaphor for us to ponder.

X. Christ did Not say he is the cake of life; and neither did he say "I am the turkey of life." There are some people who may think Jesus meant to say "I am the turkey of life." Now turkey is fine food, relatively inexpensive, very nutritious and a food that many families only have twice a year. Many families only eat turkey at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Some people think they only need to feed on Christ twice a year. Do you know what I am referring to? Those who only come to a church service on Christmas and Easter; or when it's convenient, or when their child or grandchild has a part in the program. That is where their church involvement begins and ends.

-when this current pandemic ends and life returns to some sort of normalcy we need to be reminded of Hebrews 10:25 which admonishes us with these words: "Do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some." Some only want to worship Christ on special occasions and holiday celebrations. There are many people who think of Christ as the turkey of life; who only feed on him in special occasions and relegate their relationship with Christ to the fringes of life rather than the foundation of life.

XI. In Jesus' day, bread was food eaten daily! Jesus prayed: "Give us this day our DAILY bread." When Jesus said: 'I am the bread of life', he was saying that we need Him to sustain, strengthen and support us DAILY! We need to feed on Christ daily if we are to truly live.

XII. Jesus did Not say 'I am the cake of life', nor did he say 'I am the turkey of life' ...and neither did he say 'I am the snack food of life'. By snack food, I mean that stuff we eat out of habit between

meals that is filled with calories and void of nutrition. Some people feed on Christ on the run and don't seriously consider his teachings for their daily lives. Some only want a junk food Jesus.

-the other thing about snack food is that it is strictly 'filler'. How much nutrition are you receiving from Jesus? Is Jesus the essential staple of your life or is he just filler? Jesus said 'I am the bread of life', and so he is. Many times we crave Christ in the wrong way. Our hunger is often more for cake or turkey or snack food and when we feed on those things, the basic nutrition and spiritual strength that Christ comes to offer is lacking in our lives.

- XIII. When Jesus told the crowd who had just been fed with the five barley loaves and two fish that HE is the bread of life; they quickly abandoned him. He came offering the bread of life and they wanted mere barley loaves. He comes to us saying: I am the bread of life and many would rather satisfy their desires through the shallow things of this world.

-the deepest hunger of our souls is satisfied when we feast upon the bread of life...Jesus Christ. He wants to give us life in the fullest dimension here on earth and life eternal in heaven. Jesus said: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life."

In remembrance of this promise and the great sacrifice of our Lord...his broken body and his shed blood on Calvary's cross for the remission of our sins...let do as he commands us in the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup.

- XIV. For those of you online hold the bread in your hand. For those here in person: Take the bread and cup in your hand and with the bread facing up, peel off the plastic covering and take that very small piece of bread in your hand and listen to the words from Luke's Gospel: "Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: 'This is my body, which is given for you. Partake of this in remembrance of me.'"

-let us pray: Holy God, we pray your blessing upon this sacred symbol of Christ's broken body. May we receive and partake of this bread in faith, recalling the life and death of Jesus, the Christ. Increase our gratitude and our obedience. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen

Let us all affirm and read together:

THIS BREAD WHICH WE PARTAKE IS THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Partake of the bread.

-Jesus said: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." The Apostle Paul likewise reminds us: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

- XV. Let us pray: Holy and loving God, we pray your blessing upon this symbol of the blood of Jesus, the Christ. Our hearts are lifted in thanksgiving for love poured out. As in faith we drink of this cup, may your forgiveness and divine spirit be poured afresh into our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-for those of you online hold the cup. For those here is person: flip the cup and hold it upright and peel off the plastic covering.

Let us all affirm and read together:

THIS CUP OF THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THE COMMUNION OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

Partake of the cup.

- XVI. And now let us unite our voices in song. Please stand.