

Sermon 2 August 2009

Bread of Life... Love

John 6:24-35, Ephesians

Revs. Tod and Ana Gobledale

God's love serves us; reflecting God's love, we serve others.

Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Tod: *(speaking to entire congregation)* I have a question for you to reflect on. What are some unselfish, loving things you can do, or things you already do?

Ana: *(get up and head to front.)* Okay, I'll bite. I can think of lots of unselfish, loving things I could do! What do you have in mind?

Tod: Well...I was thinking about four areas of our life, but first the environment.

Ana: What about it?

Tod: What are some unselfish, loving things you can do, or you already do, for the environment?

Ana: You mean like using that compost bucket we got a couple weeks ago at church?

Tod: Yeah, that would be a great unselfish, loving thing to do for the environment.

Ana: Or using re-usable bags when I am shopping?

Tod: Absolutely!

Ana: I saw Barbara bringing fresh vegetables from her garden to share and raise funds for Earth Keepers!

Tod: Yes, like that. Actually, that demonstrates love of the environment in several ways: Barbara does not waste her extra vegetables, someone else gets to eat some really delicious local fresh veggies. Buying locally grown food means less energy used for transporting the vegetables. And, Earth Keepers will have some money to keep up their good work to educate all of us on how to better care for our environment.

Ana: I know another unselfish and loving thing to do for the environment...in the winter turn our thermostats down, and in the summer turn them up. Or, like us, don't use air

conditioning at all!

Tod: Ana, that does not really count, because we do not have air conditioning! And there a lot more things we, as a family, could be doing and are not.

Ana: Yeah, like what?

Tod: Well, we could walk a lot more, rather than hop into the car. Anyone else have some suggestions of other unselfish and loving things to do for our environment? *Examples:*

- *Carry a bag when you walk and pick up trash*
- *walking instead of riding a car or bus*
- *car pooling*
- *advocacy*
- *using public transportation*
- *turning off lights*
- *hanging laundry up to dry rather than using the dryer*
- *recycling*

Ana: Okay, this is all very cool. But you said there are three other areas of our lives you are thinking about, where we can do unselfish and loving things. What are they?

Tod: Secondly, I am thinking about our families. What are some unselfish, loving things we can do, or do, in our homes with our families?

Ana: I like this one. I played hookey from work on Tuesday to spend time with Mandla on his birthday! That was loving, and, well not completely unselfish, I guess.

Tod: Spending time with our kids is high on my list of unselfish and loving things to do, too. For some people that means nieces and nephews and grandchildren.

Ana: And for kids, I guess an unselfish, loving thing to do is spend time with your parents, your uncles and aunts and your grandparents!

Tod: Exactly. And adults, too. Like going to visit your parents on Thursdays.

Ana: Something loving and unselfish you do every morning is make that decaf hazelnut capuccino for me when you like regular unflavored coffee.

Tod: Just don't get your expectations up!

Ana: Maybe these folks will have some ideas to share, of loving and unselfish things they do for their families.

Tod: Let's ask. *Examples:*

- *making time for your significant other*
- *phoning relatives who live afar*
- *visiting your relatives*

Ana: Okay, we have talked about what unselfish and loving things we can do for our environment and for our families. What is the third category you have in mind?

Tod: Church...What are some unselfish, loving things you can do, or already do, in church?

Ana: You mean like get here early with Verna or Rosalie and help them make coffee on Sunday morning?

Tod: Yeah, that would be an unselfish, loving thing to do!

Ana: Or like what Dottie does when she stays after on Sundays and counts the collection? Or offering to help her, because I know last Sunday she did not get home until 2:00!

Tod: Exactly! What Dottie does might be called "sacrificial" it is so unselfish, so loving. And to offer to help her out, that would be a really unselfish, loving thing to do!

Ana: Wow! I know lots of unselfish and loving things people do for this church. There's Henry who mows the lawns, and April on the sound, and Donna on the prayer list, and Ray who sets up the worship table, and Joanne who helps with Tent City, and Vanessa and Lynne who teach Sunday School, and Jo and Bev who like to share their beautiful flowers! and...wow...it would take me all morning to complete the list!

Tod: Yeah, this room is full of people who do loving and unselfish things for this church.

Ana: So, what's the other category?

Tod: The fourth and last category I am thinking of is our community. What are some unselfish, loving things you can do, or already do, in our wider community?

Ana: Wow! That is easy, too. All I have to do is look at these folks and tell you what

they already do. There is Meredith volunteering at Evergreen Hospice. There are the Lanphears who live in an intentional community that is awesome. And Jerry and George, they do so many loving and unselfish things for the community, I cannot keep track! And Barb, and Naomi, and Jim, and Sue, and

Tod: Let me interrupt. Why do you think they do those loving and unselfish things?

Ana: Wait, one more...this week Denise Michaels was telling me about how she helps her students at Cascadia College get involved in volunteering. Denise is transforming lives in that community!

Tod: Fantastic! But why do you think Denise, and these other, do these loving and unselfish things?

Ana: I don't know. And, what does this all have to do with today's worship, anyway?

Tod: Well, today is a communion Sunday, the Lord's Supper. We have bread and grape juice set out for the feast of our Lord.

Ana: Wait a minute, "supper"? Supper at our house is never a morsel of bread and a sip of Welch's Grape Juice. And "feast", I associate the word "feast" with Thanksgiving or Mandla's birthday! *This* table hardly constitutes a feast.

Tod: Ana, I know you tend to take things literally, but these elements are symbols. They point beyond themselves. They remind us, too, that we do not live by bread alone.

Ana: Oh.... So what does that have to do with all the loving and unselfish things we do?

Tod: In today's scripture lesson John says the people following Jesus receive their fill of daily bread through the multiplication of the loaves, but their lives lack something. They search for more. Jesus says their emptiness will be filled by the "bread of life." Then Jesus makes an astounding assertion. He says, "I am the bread of life."

Ana: Yeah, I have heard that before. Weird concept...like he is the Pillsbury dough boy, or some loaf of bread or something.

Tod: Exactly. Remember what else happens in John's gospel, a bit earlier, in chapter four? Jesus and the disciples arrive in a Samaritan village. And while the disciples go off in search of food, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman.

Ana: Oh yeah, is that the woman with all the husbands?

Tod: Yes, but I'm more interested in what happens after the woman departs and the Disciples return. Listen to this, John chapter 4, starting at verse 31:

Meanwhile the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of God and to complete God's work."

Ana: Whoah! That is so confusing. What does Jesus mean, his food is to "do the will of God"? That is hardly gonna fill his hungry belly.

Tod: But that is just it. Normal bread and juice fill our hungry bellies. But a different kind of nourishment fills our hungry souls.

Ana: Yeah, what?

Tod: Doing the will of God is like bread for the soul.

Ana: So what is "the will of God" we should do?

Tod: Sticking to John's Gospel we find the answer to that question in one of the most famous scripture verses in the entire Bible... John chapter 3 verse 16...In this verse, John says... Anyone want to hazard a guess? ...

Ana: (If no answer) *"For God so loved the world..."*

Tod: Yes. *"For God so loved the world..."* When I wrestle with the scriptures, when I search for the meaning of life and turn to my faith for guidance, again and again I arrive at this affirmation: God so loved the world. Or ***God so LOVES the world!***

Ana: Yeah, well, while you are wrestling with the meaning of life, I am still trying to figure out how to connect the dots here between God's love, this "feast" and doing unselfish deeds!

Tod: Ana, don't you get it?

Ana: Obviously not.

Tod: It's just logic. Jesus, and those of us who claim to be his disciples, are nourished by doing...

Ana: God's will.

Tod: Right. And God's will is ...

Ana: to love the world.

Tod: Right. So, we are fed when we love the world, when we do unselfish and loving things. Our faith brings us to this table. And the nourishment we receive at this “feast,” more than bread alone, strengthens us to go out from here and love the environment, our families, our church and our community! And these loving and unselfish actions will feed us, will fill us to overflowing.

Ana: It's like the reflection in our bulletins this morning: “Faith is being grasped by the power of Love.” Because we believe, because we have faith, it is like we WANT to do loving and unselfish things!

Tod: That is right. Denise, and everyone you mentioned before, they do those unselfish and loving things because doing the will of God gives them life!

Ana: That is cool. This all reminds me of that song from church camp about giving away love and getting more. Remember it? The refrain goes:
Love is something if you give it away, Give it away, give it away,
Love is something if you give it away, You end up having more.
Anyone else remember it? Let's sing it. *(Let Tod lead.)*

ALL: *Love is something if you give it away,
 Give it away, give it away,
 Love is something if you give it away,
 You end up having more.*

Tod: And I am reminded of that Lennon and McCartney lyric:
And in the End, the love you make, is equal to the love you take.

Let us pray. God, thank you for demonstrating the way of love and unselfishness. Thank you for loving the world. Help us remember that our nourishment, the bread of life, comes through our own unselfish and loving acts toward others. May this meal rekindle in each of us the desire to love our environment, our families, our church and our community. Through Jesus, the one who has shown us how to do your will. Amen.