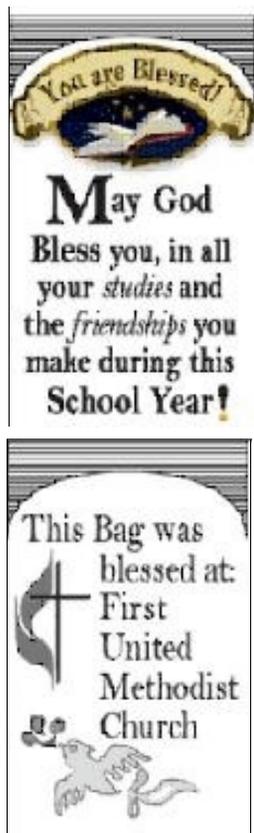


FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
An Open-Spirited Community of Faith and Action



For the Life of the World...

Learning - Faith - Community

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Larry Moffet, Pastor AUGUST 12, 2012

A 6 1/2 year old I know is worried about how first grade is going to go for her. She says, "I don't think I'll be able to read 'chapter books,'"

Family members and the pastor who baptized her tell her, "Skyler, you learn so well. You'll do fine." She says, "All my cousins and my sister know how to read chapter books and I don't think I'll be able to."

First day of school jitters are real. That is part of why we bless back packs and book bags.

Skyler will do fine. She has a loving family. Her jitters are a window on how much we need physical, emotional and spiritual food. Jesus called this the "Bread of Life."

I asked a kindergarten teacher what might be helpful, how to not be dismissive, and how to help Skyler have a little confidence. Marcee Seng, who teaches kindergarten at Hartley School says, "We try to help the children see how far they have come, by saying, 'You couldn't do this a few weeks ago and now

it is easy. It will be the same way with learning how to read chapter books.

Last week I asked you to focus on "What are you hungry for?" and also on "How are you feeding others?"

That's a good start in understanding who Jesus is as the Bread of Life. But we can't stop there. If we stop there we run the danger of thinking that we are the center of the universe. We miss out on so much that moves us beyond where we get stuck emotionally, physically and spiritually.

This week the one who calls himself the "Bread of Life" takes us a step further:

the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my body

Last week we talked about how Jesus did not stop with physical hunger. This long 6th Chapter of John's Gospel starts when Jesus feeds 5000+ people who were physically very hungry.

He started with physical food.

Then he invited them and us to be willing to feast also on spiritual and emotional food.

Let me invite us as a congregation to become a little more self-aware of ways we follow Jesus in working to meet physical, spiritual and emotional needs.

This congregation has in its DNA a multi-dimensional relationship of

Learning - Faith - Community

Can you hear how Jesus combined all three with this statement **the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my body**

Our world needs this life, this sustenance. Our world is a dangerously hungry place. We can see how far are from living as we were created, in the image of God. We are deeply concerned about the toll of violence. Since last Sunday we have seen more violence on a national level and on very local level. It seems to strike deeper and closer to us. Worshipers in a Sikh holy place were killed in what might appear to be a hate crime. In a very different circumstance, but close to home, domestic violence ended again in loss of life in our community.

This is a tragic reminder that self-doubt, fear and violence take a toll in our every-day lives.

The writer of Ephesians urges us to focus on acting in tune with what is good:

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

The Psalmist sings “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Let’s do just that!

I said there is a genius in the way this congregation lives out its faith, in a multi-dimensional relationship of **Learning - Faith - Community**

See how God is working through our efforts on so many fronts. Our announcement sheet is a faith statement. Take it out. Look at it.

Can you see many ways in which the words of Jesus are being lived out?

the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my body

This is the Bread of Life: physical, spiritual and emotional.

The original genius of this place is reflected in the way it was built:

People lived close enough to each other they had to deal with each other.

People were also given permission to engage at their comfort level in one or two or all three dimensions of life - **Learning - Faith - Community**.

Higher education first caused the birth of this Learning-Faith-Community. Then it spread. Our congregation is filled with people who value life-long learning, as well as find ways to live out faith, and build community. We, the church, the Body of Christ, are living out the words of the One who called himself the Bread of Life:

the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my body

A group of staff, faculty and close friends of Nebraska Wesleyan have formed discussions based on a book by Parker Palmer which puts the relationship between earning, faith, and community in some new light. *The Heart of Higher Education* advocates teaching and learning that is mindful of our interrelationships. It reminds us learning that takes place in community--mind, heart, and spirit-- gives us new strengths to deal with the issues we face today. This is truly Bread for the world **for the life of the world**.

I need something physical to remind me that Christ is busy at work **for the life of the world** Every time I taste and see that God is good, every time I take a nibble of bread, I want to remember the Bread of Life.

Every time I carry my backpack, my “carry-on luggage” or a satchel, I want to remember how powerful the relationship of **Learning - Faith - Community** are.

So today we will bless backpacks. You can get another blessing tag anytime. Let them be a reminder that all of life is blessed. Next week Mel will talk how we (in the words of the Wesleys) are called to “unite the two so long disjoined: Knowledge and Vital Piety.”

I like thinking of Learning as a sacrament. An ancient definition of Sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” Book bags and back packs, whether they carry books, papers or actual physical food, remind us of the way Christ feeds us physically, spiritually and emotionally, and our call to engage in **Learning - Faith -Community**.

They are also a reminder that followers of Jesus join him in sharing the bread that is “**for the life of the world**.”

John’s gospel is about a whole lot more than feeding 500+.

So are we!

Standing on our building’s front porch of our building is sacramental for me too. I can see the wise way this house of faith was placed to be a link between learning and community, I get a vision of what Christ is asking us to be:

the Body that will share he bread he gives for the life of the world, Learning- Faith-Community.

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE EPHESIANS 4:29-32

LET NO EVIL TALK COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTHS, BUT ONLY WHAT IS
USEFUL FOR BUILDING UP, AS THERE IS NEED,
SO THAT YOUR WORDS MAY GIVE GRACE TO THOSE WHO HEAR.

³⁰AND DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD, WITH WHICH YOU WERE
MARKED WITH A SEAL FOR THE DAY OF REDEMPTION.

³¹PUT AWAY FROM YOU ALL BITTERNESS AND WRATH AND ANGER AND
WRANGLING AND SLANDER, TOGETHER WITH ALL MALICE,

³²AND BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED,
FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, AS GOD IN CHRIST HAS FORGIVEN YOU.

***GOSPEL JOHN 6:35, 41-51**

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.

WHOEVER COMES TO ME WILL NEVER BE HUNGRY,
AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY."

⁴¹THEN THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS BEGAN TO COMPLAIN ABOUT HIM
BECAUSE HE SAID,

"I AM THE BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN."

⁴²THEY WERE SAYING, "IS NOT THIS JESUS, THE SON OF JOSEPH,
WHOSE FATHER AND MOTHER WE KNOW?

HOW CAN HE NOW SAY, 'I HAVE COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN'?"

⁴³JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "DO NOT COMPLAIN AMONG YOURSELVES.

⁴⁴NO ONE CAN COME TO ME UNLESS DRAWN BY OUR ABBA GOD WHO SENT
ME;

AND I WILL RAISE THAT PERSON UP ON THE LAST DAY. ⁴⁵IT IS WRITTEN IN
THE PROPHETS,

'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT BY GOD.'

EVERYONE WHO HAS HEARD AND LEARNED FROM GOD COMES TO ME.

⁴⁶NOT THAT ANYONE HAS SEEN GOD EXCEPT THE ONE WHO IS FROM GOD;
HE HAS SEEN GOD.

⁴⁷VERY TRULY, I TELL YOU, WHOEVER BELIEVES HAS ETERNAL
LIFE.

⁴⁸I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.

⁴⁹YOUR ANCESTORS ATE THE MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS, AND THEY DIED.

⁵⁰THIS IS THE BREAD THAT COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN, SO THAT ONE
MAY EAT OF IT AND NOT DIE'

⁵¹I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. WHOEVER
EATS OF THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER;

AND THE BREAD THAT I WILL GIVE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD IS
MY BODY."