

***Sermon Series: Life in Christ: Chosen, Blessed, Broken, and Given***

***Sermon Title: Given***

***2 Kings 4:42-43; John 21:15-19; Galatians 5:22-23; 25-26***

***Salem United Methodist Church***

***May 29, 2016***

***Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling***

Today we conclude the sermon series on Life in Christ. For the past three Sundays we have looked at different aspects. The first Sunday we looked how each of us is chosen by God. No one is rejected. On the second Sunday we saw how each has been blessed by God. And last Sunday we talked about how each of us is broken in some way. Christ then takes our brokenness and transforms it so we can be given. Today we speaking on the concept of being given.

Do you remember the first time you made something to give to someone or took your allowance and bought a gift for someone? I remember the first gift that I picked out and paid for with my own funds. It was a birthday present for my grandmother. I went to Woolworths with a few coins in my purse. I looked and looked. Finally I decided to buy her three small white porcelain poodles, a mother and two puppies. All of them had lace collars. The puppy poodles had a chain attached to their collars that connected to the mother poodle collars. I have no idea why I thought my grandmother would like these tiny knickknacks. She wasn't a knickknack, or porcelain, or poodle type of person, but I remember being very excited about giving these little white poodles to her. She must have sensed the joy I had in giving them to her, because she kept them sitting on the shelf for years and years.

We are at our best when we give something to another, no matter if it is a smile, a handshake, a present, or our lives. June typically is a month for weddings. There is joy and celebration in witnessing a bride and groom giving themselves to each other for a lifetime. In the book, *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen wrote, "We are chosen, blessed, and broken so as to be given... We are chosen, blessed, and broken not simply for our own sakes, but so that all we live finds its final significance in its being lived for others." Jesus both taught and led by example that the greatest fulfillment in life is to give ourselves to others. This was the whole purpose of his coming to earth in human form-to give himself for us. Another way of thinking of being given has to do with this holiday weekend in which we remember those who gave their lives for others. Young men and women, many not out of their teens, fought and gave their lives so we can live in freedom. Each day we need to remember the price they paid. This concept of a life lived for others is not lost on members of Gold Star families. This is a group no one asks to join. One becomes a member of the Gold Star when one receives the notice that a loved one was killed in action. But for others in our highly competitive and greedy world, to be given usually is a concept that can get lost.

This concept of being given is not lost on the prophet, Elisha. Prophets did not receive wages for their work, but lived off the gifts given by others. In this story a man brings Elisha his tithe, ten percent of the first fruits of his harvest which was twenty loaves of bread and other fruits of the field. Elisha doesn't think of his own needs or how to store and preserve all this bread, but he immediately tells the servant to take his food and feed the people. He is not thinking about himself, but of others who need the food more than he does. What is the first thing the servant says? "There's not nearly enough!" And Elisha responds, "God says there's plenty." And there was with leftovers. This story is reminiscent of Jesus feeding the thousands, isn't it? If Elisha would have kept all this food for himself, it probably would have spoiled. But when he gave it away, God multiplied it and there was plenty. One of the joys of giving is breaking bread together. One of the joys of this church is when we gather for a meal no matter if it is served from our kitchen or at our local soup kitchen, there always seems to be plenty. But the joy of breaking bread together isn't just about the food, but also about the sharing of our lives and the offering of hope that happens around the table. All of our social media cannot replace sitting across the table from another and breaking bread together. It is in the sharing of our lives with each other that we understand our chosenness, our blessedness, and receive healing in our brokenness.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons so much of Jesus' ministry happens with food. He does it in our Gospel lesson. After the Crucifixion and Resurrection, Peter and some of the disciples return to what they knew how to do, fishing. Jesus had been at the center of their world and their world had changed. Peter had claimed Jesus to be the Messiah yet he denied knowing Jesus three times on the eve of the Crucifixion. Peter ashamed, frightened, and broken finds solace for his pain out on the water in a boat, fishing. Being out on the water or by the water brings us peace, harmony, and healing. While Peter and other disciples were out fishing, Jesus appears on the shore. He builds a campfire on the beach and invites the fishermen to bring fish to broil for breakfast. Some of the most important conversations happen when we break bread together, in this case breaking fish together. Broken and ashamed, Peter has to face Jesus who confronts him by asking, "Do you love me?" not once but three times. The same number of times Peter denied Jesus. After Peter replied that he really did love Jesus, what does Jesus tell him? Peter is to be given for others. Jesus uses the words, "feed my lambs," "take care of my sheep," and "feed my sheep." Jesus didn't own flocks of sheep. He is referring to people, God's people. Peter out of his brokenness is to give of himself for others. Peter is to be given. This is why he was chosen, blessed, and broken so he could be given. And from what Peter gave, the church grew to what it is today. So what happens when we give from our chosenness, our blessedness, and our brokenness? Or maybe a better question is what happens if we don't? I have a story of two seas as an example. This was published on Facebook this week.

There is something strange about the geography of Israel. There are two seas in Israel: The Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is teeming with life. It contains twenty-seven species of fish, some found nowhere else in the world. Its shores are full of birds, and lush with vegetation. The Dead Sea, on the other hand contains no life at all. It's toxic and bitter. Yet both are fed by the same river, The Jordan. How could two seas, fed by a single source be so different? The answer is: the Sea of Galilee receives water at one end and gives out water at the other. The Dead Sea receives water but has no outlet. It keeps it all within itself. So it is with life: If you only receive but do not give, you do not live. So give, live, and love.

Like these two seas, we are chosen, blessed, and broken, but only the one who gives produces life. Giving from our chosenness, blessedness, and brokenness is about living God's way, living in Christ, having the life of the Spirit. We are chosen, blessed, and broken so we can give affection for others and be loving, so we can have exuberance about life and exude joy to others, so we can have serenity and provide peace, so we can develop a willingness to stick with things and offer patience, so we can have a sense of compassion in the heart and offer kindness and generosity, so we can have a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people, so we can find ourselves involved in loyal commitments and be faithful, so we are not needing to force our way in life but we can be gentle, so we are able to marshal and direct our energies wisely with self-control. These are the greatest gifts that we can give to each other as we live our life in Christ.

We are called to be bread for each other, to feed and tend the sheep. We are sent into the world. We are to be given. This doesn't mean we have to give up our ambitions, aspirations, prestige, success, and the things we enjoy, but in the midst of our chosenness, blessedness, and brokenness, in the midst of our daily lives, we are to be given. When Jesus asks us "Do you love me?" and we respond with a "Yes, Lord, you know that I do!" be ready for the instruction to go and be given to friends, colleagues, family, yes, even our competitors who are looking for something more than survival, who are looking for purpose, meaning, and acceptance, who are looking to be loved. Let them know that they are chosen, blessed, and in their brokenness loved.

**Reflection Questions:** Who has God given you to let you know that you are chosen, blessed, and loved in your brokenness? Who is God calling you to be given?

**Resources:** *Life of the Beloved* by Henri Nouwen; "A Tale of Two Seas," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrfuzYbvzKo>

