

# Breaking Bread

A Sermon by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

August 7, 2022

## Readings

### *Matthew 14:15-21 (NKJV)*

<sup>15</sup> When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

<sup>17</sup> And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

<sup>18</sup> He said, "Bring them here to Me." <sup>19</sup> Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. <sup>20</sup> So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. <sup>21</sup> Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

### *Secrets of Heaven §5405*

[I]n the Ancient Church bread was broken when it was given to another, by which action was meant the sharing of what was one's own and the passing of good from oneself to another to be their own. So it meant making love mutual. For when someone breaks bread and gives it to another they are sharing with the other person what is their own. Or when a loaf is broken and shared among many, the single loaf becomes one shared mutually by all, and all are consequently joined together through charity.

## Introduction

- Today, we're talking about a very simple action – breaking bread.
  - It's a small enough action that you might not even notice it happening or not happening.
- But, as you heard in the lesson, in ancient times and even today, that simple action corresponds to something that gets at the heart of what we're here for as human beings: sharing love and goodness.
- It makes intuitive sense that breaking bread means sharing love or goodness.
  - If someone says that they're going to "break bread" with someone, it means more than just that they're going to eat food with them.
    - There's going to be a sharing, a connecting, a coming together in that breaking of bread.
- Sharing love and goodness sounds great and it is great – it's heaven.
  - But it's also not simple.
  - How we relate to our own goodness or other people's goodness can get messy and gross.
  - The imagery of the Lord breaking bread and giving it to us to share among us can be really powerful for reminding us of how this is supposed to work and giving us something to work towards.
    - First we'll look at some of the implications of breaking bread in terms of the ideal that we're aiming towards.
    - And then we'll work through some of the objections that we might have about why it will never work and why we can't do it.

## The Ideal

### *The Bread in the Holy Supper is Shared*

- Let's talk first about the symbolism of breaking bread in the Holy Supper.
- You will have an opportunity to take the Holy Supper this morning or to witness other people taking Holy Supper.
- It's fairly common to think of taking the Holy Supper as an individual exercise – I'm usually thinking about my relationship with the Lord and what I need to be working on in my spiritual life.
  - That's fine and good but Holy Supper is not a meal eaten with just me and the Lord at the table: it is a meal eaten in community with lots of other people.
  - Even if you happen to be watching from home today when you take the Holy Supper, you are still eating a shared meal with a whole community of people.
    - The community that gathers in this building but also the worldwide community of all people who worship the Lord Jesus Christ.
- COVID has made it harder to remember this reality but it's important and powerful to remember that the bread and the wine that we are offered by the Lord is something that He gave us to *share* among us.
  - The goodness and love that *I* receive from the Lord is broken off of the same loaf as the goodness and love that *you* receive and the truth and wisdom that *I* receive from the Lord is drunk from the same shared cup as the truth and wisdom that *you* receive from the Lord.

## *How We Think About Ourselves*

- Our natural tendency is going to be to see ourselves as the the main character of the story.
  - And that's fine: the teachings of the New Church say that it's not necessarily selfish to think about ourselves a lot – we're going to think about things that happen in terms of how they affect us and that's fine (see *Secrets of Heaven* §3796:3).
- But it can get out of balance.
  - We can spend an embarrassingly large amount of time thinking about questions like
    - What do I want?
    - What do I need?
    - How do I look?
    - What would people think of this decision or that decision that I made?
    - How am I doing at work?
    - How am I doing at home?
- A lot of things can tend to reinforce this self-focus.
  - A lot of advertising and marketing is selling us things based on what they can do for us.
  - And even sermons in church can reinforce this idea that the most important thing is you and how you're doing and whether you are living up to your full potential.
    - And, in that way of looking at things, even the Lord can be seen as playing the role of someone who is there to support *you* in achieving all that *you* want to achieve.
- But that's actually an exhausting way to live and an exhausting way to look at life.
  - In that framework you're never going to be content.
  - And it's just not a true way of living or looking at life.
- You're not the main character and hero of the story; I'm not the main character and hero.
  - The Lord Jesus Christ is the main character and hero of the story.
  - And it's only because of Him that we have any story at all.
- Try that way of looking at things on, you might find that it's a lot more peaceful.
  - The Lord's in charge and He's breaking bread and freely giving each of us something good to contribute to the whole.
  - Rather than being in a mindset of asking, "How am I doing?" and "How can I succeed?" We can be in a mindset of asking, "Lord, what do you want me to do with the gifts that you've given me?"
    - "How can I be a part of Your story?"
- And you can think in a big picture, "How can I make the world a better place?" kind of way, or you can think in the specific, mundane contexts that you find yourself in.
  - If you're in school right now you can ask yourself, "What role does the Lord want me to play in my class at school?"
    - Or "What role does the Lord want me to play in my family or in my group of friends?"
  - Or if you're working a job you might ask yourself, "What role does the Lord want me to play in the dynamics at my workplace?"
  - Or people who are older and retired and who might be feeling somewhat useless you can also ask the Lord things like, "Lord, what role do you want me to be playing at this stage in my life?" and "What do you want me to focus on in my daily life to make things a bit better for the people around me?"

## ***Let Go of the Idea that the Good Things We Have Belong to Us***

- An important part of working towards this ideal is to learn to hold less tightly to the idea that the good things that we have belong to us.
- Every good thing that we have – whether it's something physical that we own, or some appealing aspect of our personality, or our knowledge and experience, or our intelligence, or whatever – all of those things are free gifts that we have received from the Lord.
  - And all of the Lord's gifts are meant to be shared and they're meant to be shared for the benefit of everyone.
  - At one point the Lord gave the disciples amazing abilities to heal the sick and cast out demons and then He said to them, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:7).
    - He's also given each of us abilities and He says to each of us, "Freely you have received, freely give."
- Naturally we're going to think that what we have been given by the Lord is ours and for our benefit.
  - And it is.
  - It's just not *exclusively* for our benefit.
- Picture a little kid at a birthday party.
  - This little kid happens to be sitting next to the person cutting the cake and so the person cutting the cake cuts a slice, puts it on a plate, and then hands it to the little kid to pass down to the next person until everyone has a slice.
  - But this little kid doesn't understand what they're supposed to do so they just assume that all of the slices of cake that they've been handed are for them.
  - And each one that they receive they just pile up at their place at the table.
- That's what we're being like when we think that what we've been given is just for us.
- To try to break this mindset, I have found it valuable to say, out-loud, a couple of times, "What I've been given is not just for me."
  - "What I've been given is not just for me."
    - Say it a couple of times because the first few times you might not really believe it.
- One book about how to teach kids about money recommends that you give your children a weekly allowance and then require them to allocate some of their money for spending on anything, some for something that they're saving up for, and some for the Lord and other people (giving to the church or charitable causes).
  - In a tangible way this reinforces the idea that what they've been given is not just for them.
  - Some of it needs to be allocated to give to the church or people who could use some assistance.
- This approach isn't just for kids.
  - When I look at *my* money in *my* bank account I need to remember that what I've been given is not just for me.
  - It's a gift – it's all a gift!
    - Even if it's money that I worked hard to earn – it's still entirely a gift from the Lord!

## ***Remembering It's a Gift Makes It Easier to Share***

- One other major benefit to remembering that it's all a gift from the Lord is that it makes it much easier to share.
- In the Family Talk I asked the kids to imagine two different scenarios.
  - In the first scenario, imagine being part of a group and I come up to you and give you some bread and ask you to please share it amongst the people in the group.
    - This is like what happened in the feeding of the five thousand.
    - The disciples were given a free gift of food by the Lord and they shared it with the people around them.
    - In that scenario it probably would be pretty easy to share what you'd been given because it wouldn't feel like it belonged to you in the first place.
  - Now imagine the second scenario: I come to you and say, "This bread belongs to you. It's your bread."
    - And then other people come to you and ask you to share it with them.
    - It would probably feel harder to share it – you might want to give them smaller pieces and keep more for yourself because it's *your* bread.
    - Isn't that weird how quickly it changes?
- It is much easier to share something if it feels like it doesn't belong to us.
  - Everything we have, in some sense, is a gift from the Lord and doesn't actually belong to us.
  - So if you're having trouble sharing with someone, try thinking of it as a gift that you were given by the Lord and see if that makes it easier.

## ***Some People Need to Learn to Be Willing to Receive***

- I also want to note that certain people have the disposition to be very giving and will naturally give away *everything* that is given to them.
  - This is the kind of person who, if they were at that birthday party and were sitting next to the person cutting the cake, they would pass along every single slice of cake and not keep any of them for themselves.
  - And I just want to say to those people, the Lord wants you to have some bread too.
    - He's got enough for five thousand men plus women and children.
    - He does not want you to be the one hungry person in the wilderness who didn't get anything to eat because you gave away everything that you were given.
    - Some of the bread is for you – to feed *your* hunger, to satisfy *your* mouth with good things (Psalm 103:5).

## ***Let Go of the Idea that the Good Things Other People Have Belong to Them***

- The other side of the coin to the idea that we should let go of the idea that the good things we have belong to *us* is that we should also let go of the idea that the good things that *other people* have belong to *them*.
  - We have to be careful with this thinking.
  - This doesn't mean that we should try to force other people to give up their ownership of what they have or that we should be resentful if other people are not willing to share.

- But we don't have to feel threatened by other people having good things.
  - Maybe they are funnier than us, or smarter than us, or seem to have more friends than us, or they're better at their job than we are.
- That's OK!
  - All of those things that they have are gifts that the Lord freely gave them.
  - We don't need to covet or feel threatened by their gifts.
- Because it's actually good for us if the people around us are very gifted.
  - That's good for the human race!
  - It's something to celebrate.
  
- This brings to mind the story of King Saul and a young soldier in his army named David.
  - 1 Samuel 18:6-9 (NKJV)
    - <sup>6</sup> Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. <sup>7</sup> So the women sang as they danced, and said:
 

"Saul has slain his thousands,  
And David his ten thousands."
    - <sup>8</sup> Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" <sup>9</sup> So Saul eyed David from that day forward.
  
- Saul's response is so understandable and so unnecessary.
  - It was a good thing for the kingdom and even for Saul that David was such a good soldier.
  - But Saul could only see it as a threat.
- It is very easy to fall into this.
  - Did you or do you currently feel threatened by your brother or sister's success or skills?
  - Do you feel threatened by other people in your same field being good at their jobs?
    - For example, a New Church minister might have to remind himself sometimes that it is a good thing if other New Church ministers are "better" at their jobs than he is or better at certain aspects of their jobs than he is.
      - They could be better than him at teaching or preaching or counseling or evangelization or reaching people or whatever and that's a good thing not a bad thing!
- We don't have to feel threatened by the gifts that that anyone else has been given by the Lord.
  - We're in a collaboration not a competition.
  - All the bread is being broken and shared with everyone by the Lord.

## Objections

- Let's shift now to talking about some objections to what I've talked about so far.
  - They might be some version of "That won't work" and "I can't do it."

### *"That Won't Work."*

- Maybe what I've been describing sounds nice on Sunday morning with nice people in church but will it actually work when *Monday* morning comes around and you're back in the world with people who are not necessarily going to be nice to you?
- When we talk about being loving and generous it can sound a lot like we're setting ourselves up to be taken advantage of and used by selfish people.
- But the Lord is not asking us to be naive doormats.
  - In the same conversation where Jesus told His disciples to freely give He also told them to "...be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).
  - Being loving and generous does not mean being stupid.
  - We are supposed to use our brains and be careful and discerning and judicious.
- Take some time to think about where you're going to be this time tomorrow and what it would look like and feel like to be in that location, in the midst of those pressures and responsibilities, and then to choose to hold it all differently.
  - Can you see how each person around you has been given gifts to contribute to the whole?
  - Can you see how you could share the bread that you've been given a bit more, while still maintaining appropriate boundaries?

### *"I Can't Do It."*

- Another objection that we might notice in ourselves when thinking about what we've talked about so far is just a depressed conviction that we're not going to be able to do it.
  - Saying to ourselves, "I'm not going to be able to be more generous and loving."
    - "I'm going to stay in my same ruts at work and my same ruts at home – I'll be sort-of nice some of the time, I'll be a bit of a jerk some of the time and nothing will change."
- Here are a few thoughts in response to that feeling.
- The two great commandments are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).
  - We are meant to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves.
  - That must be possible if the Lord has commanded us to do it.
  - In another place He says it all the more directly: He says,
    - John 15:16-17 (NKJV)
      - <sup>16</sup> "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, that you love one another."

- It is possible to love other people as much as we love ourselves because – and only because – the Lord designed, created, chose, and appointed each of us to be able to do that.
- Here's how a passage from the teachings of the New Church puts it:
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §1594:5
    - The ability to love another as oneself... is a gift from the Lord....
    - And the same passage also says that people "who love one another admit and believe that no goodness or truth is theirs but that all of it is the Lord's."
- We can see this reality of the Lord giving us the love we need depicted in a powerful way in the Last Supper story.
  - Luke 22:19 (NKJV)
    - <sup>19</sup> And [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
  - If you feel like you can't be more loving and generous, that's accurate.
    - We need the humility to realize just how little we have and how little we are without the Lord (*Secrets of Heaven* §1594).
  - But you can be more loving and generous because the Lord takes *His* love, breaks it and offers it to you to have some and to share some of it with other people.

## Conclusion

- So you can see just how much is contained in the simple action of breaking bread.
- With all of this in mind, let's break bread together today.
  - Let's freely share the goodness and love that the Lord has given us.
  - Let's appreciate the goodness and love that the Lord has given to the people around us.
  - And let's thank the Lord our loving God for sharing what He has with us so generously.
  - Psalm 145:14-16 (NKJV)
    - <sup>14</sup> The LORD upholds all who fall,  
And raises up all who are bowed down.
    - <sup>15</sup> The eyes of all look expectantly to You,  
And You give them their food in due season.
    - <sup>16</sup> You open Your hand  
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.
- *Amen.*

What are your thoughts about this topic? Email me at [malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org](mailto:malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org).