

August 8, 2021

We're continuing in our series about Jesus as the bread of life.

Last week we talked about how his teaching makes our lives meaningful. We also mentioned other ways that we experience Jesus as food that nourishes the soul.

We mentioned his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his healing, his compassion...

Today I'd like to reflect on forgiveness; specifically, how does Jesus' forgiveness feed our souls?

For me, forgiveness is the process of staying in a relationship after it is broken.

When an offense has been committed, reconciliation is the work of confession, forgiveness and remembering. Re-remembering – bringing members back together.

As we live and breathe, we are sinners, and we commit offenses against one another. It's in the air we breathe... Sometimes we just say things we don't mean, we say things that are taken the wrong way, sometimes we do things without thinking, sometimes we might just be in the wrong place at the wrong time... It happens...

Quick story... And I'm pretty sure I've told this story before; it gets to the heart of what I want to say... Way back in the early days of the internet, I was a participant on what was called Sheep-List. It was an email service; you would send an email to this computer and it would distribute your email to a set group of people.

Initially, Sheep-List participants were primarily big sheep producers and researchers just batted ideas around. The shepherds were from all around the

world; some from Australia, New Zealand, England, America, and initially the group was very small.

When I joined, there were only a couple hundred participants, and most of them already knew each other as industry leaders from around the world. I felt like I was listening in on important conversations. But quickly, the number of participants grew and consequently the conversations changed.

Instead of researchers sharing their latest findings, people would share ridiculous information like what they had for breakfast or the names of their lambs.

Understandably, the big producers and researchers just moved on, they didn't participate anymore.

Not only did the content change, but people were also becoming angry and defensive about the most ridiculous things. One person would make a negative comment about something, and suddenly, everyone would be all hot under the collar and calling everybody bad names.

Just imagine, people from all around the world, sitting in the tranquility of their own living rooms foaming at the mouth calling each other names. These little fires seemed to flare up more often than not. This was all before the social media we have today!

There was one guy from New York who always got under my skin. He always had the best of everything and he thought he knew everything there was to know about sheep. I know I wasn't the only one he irritated; he was always in the middle of some squabble.

One day, and I can't even remember what the issue was, but I was tired of it! I started to write an email going on and on about how little self-awareness he had, how he should stop to think a few seconds before he started arguing with people, how much he needed to get a life...

My email was not so nice and frankly it was very judgmental. I was so sure of my righteousness; my blood was boiling, and it felt so good to indulge that hatred.

And suddenly at one point in the writing, I had a little epiphany and it hit me like a ton of bricks-- **I was doing exactly the same thing that I was accusing him of doing!**

And whoosh... Just like that, I realized my hypocrisy, I was a little humiliated, so I simply stopped writing the email. Unfortunately, I must have been distracted, because instead of deleting the email like I wanted, I accidentally hit the send button... And Holy Cow!

That guy in New York went ballistic! Talk about gnashing of teeth, he wrote a scathing response going on and on about what a horrible person it was who would write such a nasty email and not have the guts to sign it.

Oye... I was horrified, not only because I had written the email, but because I had made the mistake of sending it rather than deleting it. And not only that, if I took ownership of the email, I would be humiliated in the eyes of every body else.

It was hard, but it was confession time... I found some courage and confessed to the whole group that I was the person who wrote the bad email. I explained I didn't sign it because I didn't finish it and intended to delete it and I explained about my own little epiphany about my own self-righteousness and hypocrisy and asked for forgiveness.

And surprisingly, the guy in New York responded with the most gracious email I think I've ever received. He was not only forgiving; he praised my honesty and integrity, and lifted me up as an example of a decent and moral human being. I was floored; I was totally surprised. This guy, who I thought was so evil, was actually a person who was forgiving, kind and gracious.

And you know what, in receiving his forgiveness, I felt free from all the hurt that I had caused. I felt free from all the bad judgments I had about him. We had reconciled with one another, and I saw him in a completely different way. I guess you could say there was a resurrection of sorts. Surprisingly, we became friends.

That whole experience was painful, and life giving, and all at the same time... Confession and forgiveness is like that. It's messy... It's hard to admit when we're wrong. And as we live in community with each other, we hurt one another, and we constantly need to reconcile with each other. It's always hard work and always a work in progress.

The good news today, is that the bread of life that Jesus gives us is his flesh. His very human body suffered and died, exactly because of sin, the very same kind of sin you and I are in bondage to. And through the resurrection, he completely forgives us our sins. He completely forgives you...

And because Jesus is the example of forgiveness, we can forgive one another. And forgiveness brings new life... it happens here every Sunday in our confession and forgiveness; it happens in our families as we tell the truth and forgive one another... It is one more way Jesus is the bread of life.

And we are reminded... Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen...