

Albany Presbyterian Church

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Have you been watching the Olympic games this week? I came across this cartoon about the spirit of the Olympics this week, and it caught my eye and made me think. I can appreciate how the games seemed to be about who was **faster** and who could go **higher and stronger**, which seems to be what all that matters.

Not **slower, deeper, and wiser**, but the essence of the Olympic Games was once encapsulated in a statement: "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well." This perspective on the value of the struggle, not just the victory, is a source of inspiration for us.

John 6 says that People followed Jesus everywhere. When they realized Jesus and his disciples were nowhere to be found, they searched for him all over. The crowd in question wanted to come to make Jesus their king. And when they finally found him in Capernaum on the other side of the lake, they said to Jesus, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Seeing their misguided enthusiasm and unfound excitement, Jesus said, "You are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give you." God guarantees the truth of who Jesus was, is, and will be. Do not work for food that spoils but for the food that endures to eternal life, meaning that they should look at what matters, look beyond the hands that feed their hunger and satisfy their need, and see the hands of God working through Jesus, feeding them with the living bread.

In the 19th century, many missionaries found that there were those whom they called the rice Christians. This refers to those who came to faith because they were fed but went away when they no longer needed the church to provide for them. Similar things also happened in Eastern Europe and other places. People came to church because the church stood up for justice and protested violence and discrimination. When these were no longer their concerns, they left the faith.

In *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, a document issued by the [World Council of Churches](#) in 2011, one of the points raised states, "If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others." Principles 4 and 5 of this document outline that "Acts of service, such as providing education, health care, relief services and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing the gospel. The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach.

This does not mean we should not feed the hungry and stand alongside those who suffered injustice and marginalization. As the church, we want to be where people can come and be fed or healed, stand together for justice, and where God's love and righteousness will transform people. But our intention should be pure. When we help others, it is because our faith calls us to do so. It is for our spiritual gain to grow slower, deeper, and wiser. At the heart of all these things is Christ, the bread of life that God sent to nourish our spirit and give us eternal life. We must not work for "the food that spoils, but for food that endures for life."

Secondly, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." Those who come to me will never go hungry, and those who believe in me will never be thirsty.

The Bread is important in all human cultures, traditions, and spirituality. It is an essential food item that is important every day. It is also important in the metaphoric, theological, and literal stories. The “Bread” appears in the Bible almost 500 (492) times. Most often, it symbolizes a gift from God. It is the blessing of God in the physical sense, as in the mana and food that fed the people and gave them life. It is also used as food from heaven; it used to symbolize the relationship between God and his people; for example, the twelve loaves of bread were placed at the table in the Tabernacle, and the holy of holies in the temple representing the twelve of the tribes of Israel, and in the New Testament, with the bread Jesus feeds the multitude where the bread represents the power of God. It symbolizes a sign of sharing, a social bond, or hospitality. It is a sign of respect and concern. It also symbolizes the word of God, which nourishes our souls. Even in the New Testament, It represents the relationship between God and the people of God, Jesus and his followers. It symbolizes the unity and oneness. We use all this symbolism in the sacrament of communion, where the bread represents Christ, the living bread. We say Christ is the living bread, a gift from God, the blessing of God in feeding us mind, body, and spirit. And in sharing the bread, we become aware of the love that unites us; in sharing the bread and wine, we offer one another the true and heartfelt service of compassion and love as we receive them through Christ.

The bread symbolizes Jesus’ body, which was broken on the cross, signifying his death that delivers us. The bread is not just a symbol but a way to participate in the unity of Christ.

How do we do well as a church? We do well in eating the bread of life and believing in Jesus, that is, in becoming like Christ, knowing Jesus more, and always being in Christ’s presence. Christ, the living bread, is the essence of us as the church, our bread and butter, and our true purpose.

Paul explains that faith is our true calling, which, according to John, is eating the bread of life. Speaking to Ephesians who were a multicultural and diverse community much like ours, Paul says to live out our true calling, we need to be completely humble, gentle, and patient, bearing each other in love and always being united in one body, one spirit, one hope in one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and One God. And they may be one as they share in one bread, where Christ is the bread. In Jesus, God works out his purpose of salvation, and we are the church, Christ’s body. We are called to work together, build up, and grow to mature, as in verse 13 of Ephesians 4, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book called “The Life Together” says, “What is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is the fellowship of Christian brethren, a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let them, who until now have had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians, praise God’s grace from the bottom of his heart. Let them thank God on their knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in a community with Christian brothers and sisters.”

Jesus said I am the bread of life, and all who come to me will never be hungry or thirsty; he said he came so we may have the fullness of life (John 10:10). **Not faster, higher, or stronger, but slower, deeper, and wiser...** So we thank God for his Son, Jesus Christ, the bread of life, with whom we have the church, one another, united in one bread, to feed us with food that does not spoil but lasts forever. Jesus is the bread of life. Thanks be to God.

Amen.