



Sermon

Rev David Saude

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

Selkirk, MB

sauded@mts.net

See it! Believe it! Do it! **Easter 2 April 22, 2001** **John 20:19-31**

Peace be with you! May the risen Christ meet you in the places where you find yourself closed and doubting. And, having been comforted by the risen Christ, may you be sent to live by this spirit of new life. Amen.

Jesus took a loaf of bread and blessed it and broke it.

I offer you this loaf as a symbol of the providence God has given you. Let this be your income for the week or the month or the year.

Half of it, of course, goes to taxes.

Why are we so negative about paying our taxes? This is the part of the loaf that gives us our schools and hospitals, our police and emergency response personnel, our highways and courts. This part of the loaf gives us parks and beaches, clean air and waterways. These are gifts to the community for public safety and well-being. Of course we have concerns for the good stewardship of this part of the loaf—but we may be more at peace with taxes if we considered them part of our stewardship—a privilege and an opportunity to share with the community.

A privilege and an opportunity. Taxes? Now that's a stretch. But some of you received small loaves of bread when you arrived this morning. Most of you did not. Would those of you who have no bread this morning raise your hands? You represent the vast majority of people in the world who have inadequate incomes—and therefore do not have the capability, the opportunity, the privilege of sharing very much—even through taxes.

Jesus was asked whether it was right to pay taxes. His answer was that we should give to the government what belongs to the government and to God what belongs to God. Jesus also taught in many other ways that everything belongs fundamentally to God. We live our faith by the love we give to the world through our gifts and commitments—even our taxes.

But let's set that part of the loaf aside. And for the moment I want to set aside another piece also. I'll come back to that shortly.

From this middle piece, a fairly substantial piece yet, we cover our expenses: for housing and for meals, transportation, clothing, insurance, health care, entertainment. These are things for which we have some discretion. Of course we need to eat, but we have choices about what we eat. We need to get from place to place, but we have choices about having a car and what kind of car or whether to use public transportation or a bicycle or simply walk. We have choices about where we live, within certain limits, of course, but there is still discretion.

And with that discretion, comes a certain amount of freedom and a certain amount of joy.

Again, those of you who have no bread this morning, please raise your hands. With no income, or very limited income, you have much more limited choices. You may not have your own bedroom—or a detached house. You may not have a house at all, not even an apartment, perhaps only a tent. Perhaps you must even move from place to place, from night to night, looking for some cover over your head, some heat to take off the chill.

If you have no bread, you may not be able to buy the medicines you need, or dental care, or toothpaste. You may not watch TV, or even have the eyeglasses to see it. You may not have books to read; you may not know how to read. With limited bread you have limited opportunity. But does that mean necessarily that you have limited joy?

But this is our loaf and our wage and our discretion for how we spend it. And there is some satisfaction in that. Even for our children as we teach them the responsibility of an allowance and give them the freedom of some discretion.

A piece of the loaf goes to taxes. A piece of the loaf goes to necessities. What about this third piece? I suggest to you that this is a fun piece, a part of the loaf reserved exclusively for your joy.

Now some people never have the privilege or the opportunity for this joy because they tear off what is required for taxes and shred the rest for necessities and often find themselves disgruntled because there's nothing left. There's never enough left. And they work harder trying to

have more. And they borrow from others to have more. But, too often, they still are disappointed and unhappy about where the loaf has gone.

Are you?

Remember what I did? I gave to Caesar what was Caesar's, the taxes that were fair and responsible. And some of us stewards know there are even options there for those who have some room for discretion. Part of the loaf went to taxes and part of the loaf covered the necessities—and part of the loaf was set aside for joy.

Now what will you do with that? Well, we can put it back over here, with more taxes—but that probably isn't very popular.

More likely, we'll tear up this part and put it back in with the necessities. So a second car becomes a necessity—or steak instead of hamburger—or a house with three bathrooms instead of one.

Have you noticed that our definition of necessities has changed from those of our parents or grandparents? Remember when it was a joy to have a telephone with a party line? Now we require cordless and even cell phones. There was a time when the phone rang and we didn't even know it; we were not home. Now we have to have an answering machine, a pager, a cell phone, call forwarding, call waiting. This is all discretionary. And the freedom to be discretionary is supposed to make us happier and more at peace.

But I'm not so sure it is. It seems to me that those who have no bread can be as happy as we—but they may not be at peace. It's hard to bury your children because there is no clean water or medicine or adequate food.

It seems to me that those who have lots of bread and all the options and bells and whistles can be still unhappy and may struggle with just as many and differently dangerous threats to their sense of peace.

We have celebrated the death of our Lord and the resurrection of our Lord and in all of this recent experience we have been invited to look at things differently—and in that new perspective, in that new life, to find love and courage and hope and peace.

"Peace be with you," Jesus said. "So (in that peace) I send you," Jesus said. Why? So others too may have peace and believe and have this new life also.

Taxes. Necessities. And this piece of the loaf reserved entirely for our peace and joy.

I said taxes were a privilege and an opportunity. And this piece also is a privilege and an opportunity. A privilege because it is not taken from our necessities. And an opportunity because it is more than enough.

So what do we do with it?

Well, again, it's for our joy and our peace, and for the joy and peace of others. To use this for our own joy and peace, exclusively, turning privilege into necessity, is sort of like that manna stuff in the Old Testament—gather more than you need, hoard it, and it seems to spoil on you. Gather it and fear losing it, gather it and fear it will never be enough and lo and behold it isn't! And this yearning for security has left you insecure.

When there's enough for here (taxes) and for here (necessities) we have the privilege and the opportunity to be at peace and to share so others may have peace also.

Out of the abundance of life that is given us, we have something to share. It is our privilege and our opportunity.

So, we give where we have the joy of giving—where we have the opportunity—because we have been given the privilege. The cancer society, the heart fund, the kidney foundation, the society for the blind, a street ministry for youth, a care society for the aged, a library, a symphony, a university, a church, an agency for relief and justice and development overseas or across the street.

Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it. One time he took the lunch of a small boy. There was an opportunity and the boy had the privilege. That lunch would be remembered forever for the numbers it fed.

Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it. For the peace of the world. And the unity of the world. And the hope for the world. And the love of the world.

If you have bread today, you have the privilege and the opportunity to decide what you will do with it. I hope you can have some fun, share some joy, create some peace.

And if you have no bread, know that Jesus took the loaf and blessed it and broke it and gave it for you ...

Peace to you this day. Know it. See it. Believe it. And do it! Amen.