

**Loved Ones**  
***Given (part I)***  
**March 27/28, 2010**

In the Gospel of Luke we read that, on the night he was betrayed by Judas; three or four hours before he was handed over to the authorities to be crucified, Jesus gathered his apostles together to celebrate the Passover – an annual meal designed to help the People of Israel remember that time many centuries before when God had delivered them from slavery in the land of Egypt. And at this occasion, Jesus brought them together and said,

*“I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won’t eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.”*

*He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.”*

*After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.”*

*Luke 22:14-16,19-20 (NLT)*

I think it’s significant that, at the climactic moment of his ministry with these 12 men, knowing that in just a few hours he was going to suffer and die on a Roman cross, Jesus reminds them that his ultimate purpose here ...

- Was not to give instruction on how to live a better life (though he did that through his many teachings).
- It wasn’t to provide some kind of “proof” that God really does exist (though he did that as well through his many miracles).
- And it wasn’t to encourage them to trust that God would meet their daily needs (though he did teach them to pray in that way).

At the climactic moment of his life and ministry, Jesus made it very clear that his disciples needed something beyond instruction, evidence and even providence: they – and we - needed a savior; someone who would deliver them – and us – from the power and penalty of sin just as Moses had delivered the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

And Jesus made it very clear to them, in this ceremony, that his body and his blood would be the instrument of that deliverance. His body and his blood would be the eternal sacrifice that atoned for the sin of a world that had turned its back on God, and still does even to this day.

**And why?**

*“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world [though the world deserved to be judged; we deserve to be judged], but to save the world through him.”*

*John 3:16-18 (NLT)*

And the meal that Jesus and his apostles shared on that fateful night was to be a reminder of that, not only for them but for the generations of believers who all over the world who would eventually come to know Him as savior and follow

him as Lord.

So, this morning, we're going to join them in this ceremony which we know as The Lord's Supper or Communion. In just a minute, the band is going to play another song and that will be your cue to move towards one of the tables.

Now, I know we usually do this towards the end of a service and you may not feel like you're ready to do this just yet, maybe you just got the kids to Adventureland, or you just got out of the parking lot, but that's OK. I'm pretty sure that Jesus' disciples weren't "ready" when he took the bread and the cup and gave it a significance far beyond anything they had ever imagined.

So, let's just do exactly what they did. Let's take a piece of bread and dip it into the cup with just this one thought: "this represents the body and blood of Jesus, given because God loved the world so much." That's it. Just that one thought.

And then we'll talk about this experience a little bit more, later in the service. OK? Here we go.

**Loved Ones**  
***Given (part II)***  
**March 27/28, 2010**

People of love rise and give yourself away.

If you're wondering why we did communion so early in the service, it's because we wanted to begin with a reminder that the One who was *The Beloved* of God – Jesus of Nazareth – was also the one who was *given* by God.

I say Jesus was "The Beloved" because, as we saw in the first week of this series, that's what He was called by his Father in Heaven. And maybe some of you remember this:

**Immediately following His baptism ...**

*A voice came out of the heavens: "You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased" [or "in you I delight"]. Mark 1:11 (NASB/Young's Literal)*

And the one who was loved by God was given by God in service to the world.

But this is what God does, not just for Jesus, but for everyone whom He loves. As we've seen so far in this series ...

**Those who follow and belong to Christ are ...**

- Loved, therefore chosen ...
- To be blessed ...
- To be broken ...
- To be "given" (which we'll talk about in more detail in a minute.)

Reviewing: because he loves us, God chooses us – which means he knows us, he desires us, he draws us and he invites us to belong to him and to his people. We talked about that in the first week.

Then, because He loves us, God blesses us, which means his favor rests on us unconditionally. We talked about that in the second week.

Then, as Ladell so wonderfully taught us last weekend, God *in love* often breaks us or allows us to be broken. It's a hard thing to understand, but it's true.

But all of these things happen so that we, the “people of love” can “rise and give ourselves away” (as the song said). We are loved, therefore chosen, blessed, and broken so that we can be given. If we have come to Christ as our savior and received his grace and mercy that is our core identity ... because that's exactly what happened to Jesus.

In fact – and maybe you noticed this – we saw those four things illustrated in the story of the Last Supper and our communion. Remember what Jesus did in serving the bread?

### **It says that ...**

*He took some bread [he chose the bread] and gave thanks to God for it [he blessed it]. Then he broke it into pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given [broken] for you.”*  
Luke 22:19 (NLT)

In other words, “Guys, see what’s happening to this bread? This bread right here is me. I’ve been *chosen* by my Father, because he loves me. I’ve been *blessed* by him; and now, I’m about to be *broken*, broken just like this bread, so that I can be *given* to you and to this world.”

“And whenever you guys do this little meal, this little ceremony, I want you to remember this. Remember that this is who I am. And I want you to remember that this is who you are as well. You are chosen, you are blessed, you are (and will be) broken so that you can be *given*.”

To illustrate the point even further for his disciples, John’s Gospel tells us that, after this object lesson with the bread, Jesus ...

*... got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.*  
John 13:12 (NIV)

Think about it guys; think about what you have just seen and experienced: do you understand what I have just done for you?

And then, in case they hadn’t understood (which usually was the case) ...

## Jesus said, here's the deal ...

*“You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.  
John 13:13-14 (NIV)*

*“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” John 13:15-16 (NIV)*

“Here's the point, guys, in case you don't understand what's just happened: I, the Messiah of Israel, have been given to you and to the world by My Father. I have become your servant. And because I have been given, I am now giving you. You are to become servants in the same way that I am a servant.”

Loved ... therefore chosen, blessed, broken and then given as servants. That's us, if we follow Jesus.

And so, what I want to talk about today is *what it means to be given by God*. And I suppose I could keep it really simple and say that it just means “being available to do whatever God wants you to do, whenever He wants you to do it no matter what.”

And that *is* what it means, but I think if we're going to actually become the kind of people that can live that way, we need to understand, first of all, why being “given” matters – what its value is to us and, more importantly, how it demonstrates that God loves us; and secondly, I think we might need some practical advice on how to actually live it out. So that's what I want to do.

## The Value of “Given-ness”

Let's start with the *value* of “given-ness” or “being given.” Why does this matter? How does this demonstrate that God loves us so much?

Well, several reasons come to mind. The first one is kind of obvious I think.

### 1. Being given gives purpose and meaning to being chosen, blessed and broken.

Let's think about this. If Jesus had taken this bread, chosen the bread, held it up and he thanked God for it, and then he broke it and then he set it aside without ever giving it to the disciples to eat, and just moved on and said, “ok, now let me illustrate something else for you. I'm going to wash your feet and there will be a little object lesson out of that...” If he had just done that, what good would that have accomplished? The choosing, the blessing and the breaking of the bread would have been totally pointless.

To put it another way, from the perspective of the bread (which is kind of odd, I know – think like a loaf of bread!) ... from the perspective of the bread, it's the act of being given to be eaten that makes the process of being chosen, blessed and broken have meaning and value.

And to me this is so encouraging for those of us who are followers of Christ ... because it means that all if the events of

our lives matter. See, everything that has happened to you to this point, matters: the choosing of God in your life, the blessing of God in your life, and even the breaking of God in your life – it all counts because God has done this for you so that you (as well as all the People of God) can be given in his service. That was true when you got up this morning. Everything that happened up until this point has purpose and meaning because God is allowing it in your life so He can give you. And it is going to be true in your life when you wake up tomorrow morning as well. The fact that God is giving you in service to the world in some way (which we'll talk about in more detail) gives everything that has come before this moment purpose and meaning.

How loving of God to do that for you and me, his children. The second reason why I think it matters so much that God gives his loved ones to the world is that ...

## **2. Givenness is what keeps chosenness from becoming a source of pride and arrogance...**

Givenness is what keeps chosenness from becoming a source of pride and arrogance. And we talked about this a little bit at the beginning of the series when we looked at what it means to be chosen, because sometimes, people who are not Christ followers, they hear that kind of talk and they think, “Oh, you Christians are so arrogant. You think you're something special because you're chosen. You think that you're better and more important than everyone else because God has some how singled you out.” (And quite honestly, people respond that way to us sometimes because *that's how some of us act!*)

But God says over and over again in the scripture that being chosen isn't about somehow being more important, valuable or special than anyone else. In fact, God was very blunt about this with the Children of Israel.

### **Moses reminded them:**

*The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! [you were the wimps; you were nothing!]  
Deuteronomy 7:7 (NLT)*

“I chose you (God said to Israel) not because you somehow had some worthiness in you; I chose you because I have something that needs to be done in this world. I need people who will know Me and love Me and then turn around and represent Me to other people who do not know and love Me. And, I'm appointing you to this task. That's why I'm choosing you, so don't get a big head over it, like you're somehow more special than anyone else.”

### **As one theologian puts it:**

People are chosen in order to serve God in the task of leading others to God. In them God seeks the world ... for in His mercy He has called the chosen to the service of His Kingdom among the nations of the earth.<sup>1</sup>

See, being “chosen” is more about others than it is about “us.” And it's “givenness” that keeps “chosenness” from becoming arrogance. How loving of God to do that for his children!

Ok, one more reason why I think being given is so important.

### **3. It's through being "given" that God, in his love for us, provides us with a purpose that transcends self.**

Now think about this in terms of a parent and a child. One of the most *unloving* things a parent can ever do for their child is to allow a child to grow up totally self-centered. Isn't that true? I mean, from the very beginning, a good parent will try to help their child pay attention to their surroundings, be sensitive to the people around them, that's it's not "all about you."

To not do that, to allow a child to be totally self-centered, would be unloving of a parent, right, because there is nothing more miserable in this world than a person who is totally consumed with self. Now it may not be that way in the beginning, but eventually that self-focus becomes inward and destructive. So, one of the most loving things a parent can do, one of the most loving things God can do is to give us to the world. To take those who He chooses and blesses and breaks and give us to the world. To say to us –

*"You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit ..." John 15:16 (NLT)*

"I have chosen you ... but not just for your own sake. I have blessed you so that you can be a blessing to *them* (to the people who do not know me). My favor rests upon *you* so that maybe one day My favor might rest upon *them*. I allow you to be broken so that in your weakness, I can demonstrate my love and power, to the broken of this world. So, in love (in all of these things, God is saying), I am giving you a purpose that transcends your own life." How loving of Him to do that.

### **Living as "The Given"**

Ok, those are just a few of the reasons why I think being "given" is so awesome and actually demonstrates to us that we are God's loved ones.

But let's get practical for a minute. How you we actually live out the idea that you are being *given* to the world as its servants? What does it take to be the kind of person who is "available to do whatever God wants you to do, whenever He wants you to do it no matter what"? Well, I think several things,

#### **1. First of all, I think you have to commit yourself to Christ. I really do.**

I don't think you can do this without committing yourself to Christ. And I'll explain what I mean by that, but first let me explain what I mean by committing yourself to Christ. I mean just stopping the pretense that you've got it all figured out on your own, that you can somehow justify yourself before God, and just turn to Jesus and say, "Jesus, what you did on the cross was for me. You did it because you love me. I might not feel it, there may not be a whole lot of people in my life who love me, but I'm going to believe you. I'm going to believe you did it for me and you love me." So, you commit yourself to Christ and say, "Jesus, you be my savior and you be my Lord." And I know that there are some of you, you've been sitting around here for awhile, hearing this message over and over and over. And you may be thinking, is there a point in life when you sign on the dotted line? Some churches have you walk down the aisle and all that kind of stuff. Here is what we do – we baptize people when they get to that point. And on the weekend after Mother's Day, May 15/16, we're going to have a baptism service. We set up a little pool in here and it's really cool and everybody celebrates while we baptize people who've come to this point of committing themselves to Christ and

receiving his love. And some of you – you need to do that. And when we start making the promotion of how we’re going to do that, you need to be signing up for that, because that’s how we do it.

But, let me explain why I think if you want to live as “the given” it has to begin with your own personal commitment to Christ. There are a lot of people in this world today who live according to a strong social conscience. And you may be one of them. You may look around and see some of these people. They want to, they have this urge in them, to give their lives in service – they really do want to live as “given to the world.” It might be the profession they do; it might be they volunteer and have passion for a cause, making the world a better place. They want to live as “given to the world,” but personally, they have never experienced the love of God that chooses and blesses and breaks. And so, what happens is their labor for the world is not coming out of the love of God that’s overflowing in them, and as a result many of those people become crusaders. They become angry and bitter at the world because they want to fix it, “there’s something wrong and I’m going to fix it!” So, the people of the world, instead of being an object of love that they are to God, they actually become the enemy. They become a place for a person to carry out a personal vendetta against “them” – whoever “them” might be.

In my opinion, this is why politics is so screwed up in this country right now, on the right and on the left. Everybody wants to fix the world but it’s not coming out of a place of love. And, I’m just going to lay this out here and I’m probably going to get in trouble for this but I’m just going to say it – you’ve probably figured out by now that I’m pretty conservative politically, and I’ll just admit that I watch Fox News because I think you hear a side of things on that channel that you don’t hear in the mainstream media, but I’ve got to tell you that some of those voices who are the loudest are not coming from a place of love. They’re coming from a place of arrogance and it bothers me. And, just so I’m an equal opportunity offender here, you can turn to MSNBC and get the same stuff. Left and right - it’s just as bad. There are a whole bunch of people who are acting the part of being “given to the world” but they themselves are not experiencing the love and the grace and the mercy of Christ and that’s why it comes out with such bitterness.

Now, having said that, it’s really easy to point fingers at them isn’t it? The same thing is true for a lot of us. At our own level, some of us are trying to give ourselves away. We’ve got some cause or something we’re passionate about, but we’re not committed to Christ – we’re not experiencing his love on our own and so that comes out in a bitter and harsh way to the people around us. To truly live as the given, however, we need to start at the beginning and that’s with being loved yourself by God.

**See, the truth is that you have nothing of God to offer people until you have been blessed. But they won’t listen to you or receive from you until you have been broken.**

That’s how it works. You have to be blessed in order to have something to share. You have to be able to say with some authenticity “come see what I’ve found – come and see that I have found a God whose favor is upon those who turn to Christ as savior; who trust in cling to and rely on him.”

See, living as the given begins with committing yourself to Christ and experiencing for yourself what it means to be one of God’s loved ones.

I think the second way you actually live out being given to the world as its servants is to ...

**2. Commit yourself to a church.**

Commit yourself to a church. And, just to be clear, it doesn't have to be this church, it could be any church. Find a church and then commit yourself to it because the church is the collective of people who are committed to Christ. In fact, in the NT, there's no such thing as Christianity without a commitment to a church. And I could quote scripture after scripture, but here is just one,

**Paul wrote:**

*You [who have come to Christ] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)*

You're not on your own. You're not a lone ranger, so commit yourself to a church.

And sometimes the question comes up, "Well, how do you do that around North Heartland? How do you commit yourself to church?" Well, in a week from this Wednesday, on Wednesday night, we're going to have the Introduction to North Heartland class and that's how you would get into membership at this church. And if you've been wondering - what is the church about? What do you guys stand for? What are you doing? What do you believe? - You come to that class and at the end of that class you'll have the opportunity to become a member, to make a formal commitment to this church. See, you're not a lone ranger. You've got to commit yourself to a church where the people see themselves as "given, collectively, to God" in some way. And just to lay it out there, in this church, here is what we are given to, collectively - we are here primarily to reach the people in our local community who are not believers in Christ. I've said it before and I'll say it again (probably until you're sick of hearing it), if the people in our local community are not being drawn to what we're doing and not being drawn to Christ through us, then we should close this place down regardless of how wonderful the children's or youth programs are; or if everybody loves the ECC; or if the music is great or the small groups are wonderful. It doesn't matter. We are given, as a church, for *them*, outside of this.

That is why next weekend, Easter, is so important. A bunch of *them*, our friends and family who are not part of this church, are going to be coming to be part of what we're doing next weekend. So, I just want to make it really clear that next weekend is a really good concrete opportunity to give ourselves away. And Shannon has helped us to understand some of the things involved in the Eggstravaganza. But, I've got to tell you that when I hear there are still 100 volunteers needed, *a week before* - come on, what are we doing? And this morning I was told by our children's people that they had to close down one of the children's areas because we don't have enough volunteers back there. And, I'm going, "what if next week 1,000 people show up on Saturday night and Sunday and there are no people working and we have to turn their children away?"

And, another thing that's going to happen next week - right now this venue, the 11:00 service, is full. If somebody came in from the outside and looked for a seat, it would be really hard, really uncomfortable to come up here and sit next to you people - not because of who you are. And so, we need some people, next week, to make a commitment to sit down in the Dining Hall, and say, "I will enjoy Easter Sunday in the Dining Hall on the simulcast screen down there." And, just so you know, we're making a commitment from this side - that we're going to treat the Dining Hall at 11:00, from next weekend through the end of the July 4<sup>th</sup> week, just like this area. We'll set it up just like it is in here. Sometimes I'm going to go down there and do the message live down there. I'm not going to tell you when, I'm just going to show up. And we'll broadcast it back in here. Because we've got to make room for people in this service. So, some of you, a way you could give yourself away would be to say, "okay, for this period of time, that will be my church. I will go down



there.” And we will make it feel, as much as we can, like what happens in here. Anyway, I could go on and on but I won’t. I’ve probably said too much.

Ok, commit to Christ; commit to a church ... That’s how you live out “begin given.” The third way you can live out being given to the world as its servants is to ...

### **3. Be “salt and light” right where you are.**

Whether you’re a stay-at-home mom or dad and you’re salt and light to your children; whether you’re an employee or a boss and you just treat your co-workers in a loving way; whether you’re coaching little league (soccer, volleyball, whatever); whether you’re a friend; whether you’re driving down the road and you see a person standing on the street with a sign saying “homeless” and you stop and give them \$20 because that’s Jesus standing there - that’s what he told us.

In the moment be salt and light. That’s what Jesus was talking about when he told his followers:

*“You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and [connect that with] praise your Father in heaven.”*  
*Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)*

And, I think we just need to start thinking that way – salt and light, right where we’re at. What can I do in this moment?  
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Commit yourself to Jesus. Commit yourself to a church. Be salt and light right where you are. Those are all critical steps in living as “the loved ones who are given.” But none of them are as important, I think, as this last one, because I think this is where the battle is won and lost for most people on this issue.

### **4. Believe that God really can use you.**

You’ve got to believe that God really can use you. And a lot of us hear this kind of message and think, “Man, Rick’s really amped up about this thing, *but*, I don’t see how it works out for me. You know, I’ve got a job. I’ve got kids. I don’t really see how God is going to use me. It sounds really cool but...” So, we hear this but we just kind of give up on the idea. It’s for somebody else. Or we think, “Well, if I could do what you did, Rick – quit my job and go into the full-time ministry, then maybe God could use my life in some way.” See, we can’t make the connection with how it plays out in little ways and so, instead of taking steps in the direction of the little things we *can* see (like serving in Adventureland; or help with the Eggstravaganza), instead of taking that little step, because we can’t see the whole picture, we just kind of give up and eventually, we stop believing this. And I think a lot of people fall into that trap.

But there’s another reason that I think people don’t believe that God wants to use them. I think people look at their past sins or their present imperfections, and they say, “Well, you know, in my past I did this or I said that, so there is no way God can use me” or “I struggle with this in my life right now or I’m not mature enough in that, so there is no way God can use me.”

But I’m here to tell you friends, that’s wrong and, yes, God can use you because God always uses imperfect people. Just

look at the scripture,

- God used Abraham (and we think of Abraham as the father of many nations and the first person God came to when he said I'm going to redeem this world; I'm going to restore and renew this world) ... well, Abraham, if you read the story, out of fear pretended that his wife was his sister and offered to let her sleep with the king so that he wouldn't get killed. That's the kind of person God chose to use.
- God used Sarah, who was Abraham's wife ... when the angel came to her (when Sarah was an old woman), and said, the promise that God made to Abraham about being the father of many nations, it's going to happen to you even though you're 90 years old, she just *laughed at him*. God used her anyway.
- God used Moses to deliver the people from the nation of Egypt ... Moses, you know his story, he killed a guy in anger, an Egyptian soldier who was abusing one of his countrymen, and then in fear ran to hide in the desert for 40 years. God said "I'm using you."
- God used Esther ... a servant girl who, as a captive, was forced to become part of the king's harem in a foreign nation, but eventually she became the queen and delivered God's people at a crucial moment.
- God used Peter ... who denied that he knew Jesus three times on the night of Jesus' trial.
- God used Paul ... a man who said of himself that he was "the worst of all sinners."

In fact, listen to what Paul wrote:

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work.*

*He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him ...*

Because I am so wonderful and so qualified and there is no better choice than me on the face of the earth to do God's work. Isn't that what he said? No! That's not what he wrote. He said, God chose to use me

*... even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. 1 Timothy 1:12-13 (NLT)*

*Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all.*

*1 Timothy 1:14-15 (NLT)*

*But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.*

*1 Timothy 1:16 (NLT)*

And that's what God wants to do in us friends. Because he loves us, he gives us to the world to serve it in some way so that we can become prime examples of God's patience with even the worst of sinners, or the least qualified, or fill in the blank. See, what God wants to have happen is for people in this world to look at you and to look at me and go, "you've got to be kidding, if God can do something with *that* guy or *that* gal, maybe there is hope for me. Maybe God could really do something in my life."

## Conclusion

But you've got to believe. That's what it all comes down to, right? Every time it always comes down to – do we trust what God is telling us? Do we believe the good news, first of all, that God loves us so much that He chooses us? He says, "I'm going to choose you. Then I'm going to bless you. I'm going to take your life and I'm going to make you the object of my favor. And even though you may not see how it all works out right now, you are not cursed. You are blessed. I'm favoring you. To see that our brokenness is not a sign that God has abandoned us or that yeah, we really are cursed. But, it's something that God is actually going to use so that he can better prepare us to be given. And that being given is a loving thing that God does for us.

Do you see that? I hope you do. I hope you can grasp this and believe this is true about you and about God. In fact, let's pray to that end.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://doctor.claudemariottini.com/2010/02/election-of-israel.html> . The quote actually referred to the choosing of Israel; I have modified it to speak of the New People of God in Christ.