

Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35; "Not for the Food?"; 8/2/09; Albany UMC

Once again, it is good to be home.

Many of you know this was not my first trip to overseas; but I got to tell you-- this trip was a little different.

When we visited places in Uganda and Congo, I met some of the poorest people in the world.

It was a heart breaking experience; having grown up in a poor country after a war, I thought I knew what it means to be poor. But I was wrong. The people I met two weeks ago in Africa are way worse than I was 40 some years ago in Korea.

Four words may be appropriate to describe what I saw there: dust, lack of water, mosquitoes, and lack of food.

There was a lot of dust as you could imagine.

Many roads are not paved; and because of dry weather people live in dust. And surprisingly, there were lots of cars too. Plus, air pollution from cars is very serious. No wonder we all got sick one way or another.

Water was a big problem.

Many places we stayed in had plumbing system; but water was available only at certain times. Not hot water, though. We saw many people draw water from wells here and there; but their water is not safe to drink; you have to boil it.

Mosquitoes.

Wherever we went, we had to sleep in mosquito nets; we are still taking Malaria pills. Well, on that matter, we were all fine.

The most difficult problem was food, of course. As guests we were all well fed although we got tired of those same steamed potatoes all the time. But to them, it was a huge challenge.

I do not want to go into all the details of structural problems. The bottom line is that we just didn't know where to start when it came to the food issue.

The problem is too big; people are struggling; but we know that we can only do so much and they have to work harder themselves and we need to continue to work with them; that is all I can say.

Coming back home with such an overwhelming experience, I read today's Gospel lesson.

One verse struck me hard: Jesus says to the crowd, "Don't work for the food that perishes..."

I don't know; my eyes just stopped there; "Do not work for the food?"

We all work for the food; we all work for the basic need--three meals a day; we need to eat and we need to support our families; what do you mean?

There are people who are desperate for work because of this: three meals a day.

To many folks, food can be the best Gospel. What do you mean "Don't work for the food that perishes?" Does that mean Jesus did not care about the fundamental physical need we have?

Don't get me wrong. If you read the very beginning of chapter 6, Jesus is sitting down with his disciples on a hill and watching the crowd coming his way; before anyone even mentions, Jesus asks one of his disciples where he could buy bread so that the hungry crowd may eat.

Right after then, Jesus performs what we call "Feeding Five Thousand" with five loaves and two fish miracle.

In other words, Jesus' first concern is to have compassion for those who are hungry. And then, now he says, "Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life.

Food is important. But life is more than filling my own stomach—this is the point Jesus is making.

In today's Ephesians' text, St. Paul is asking us to *lead a life worthy of the calling*. What calling? Is someone calling us?

Yes.

If you read the whole book of Ephesians, you will be reminded that God called us first out of His grace. It is not us calling God but God calling us even before we realize it.

What a blessing it is for us to be called by the loving voice of God.

What a blessing it is for us to call God our Father, Mother, or both;

What a blessing it is for us to come and worship Him;

What a blessing it is for us to be in His presence;

What a blessing it is for us to be nourished in spirit and truth;

What a blessing it is for us to have this hope in God's promise?

More importantly, what a blessing it is for us to be part of God's dream by responding to His call!

God has blessed us so much despite the fact that we do not even deserve it.

But the Christian life does not stop there; we have got to do something! We have got to respond to it; we have got to live a life that is worth living; we have got to think of others, especially those who are less fortunate and those who are hungry.

On the way back home, I stayed in London for a few days; as a Methodist, I really wanted to visit John Wesley's historic churches.

I worshipped at the Wesley Chapel; Wesley, the founder of Methodism, started in 1777 and served the church as pastor too.

His grave is there in the church backyard.

In the basement of the church, there is a museum where they have Wesley's original pulpit; they allowed me to stand in the pulpit. What an honor!

Next to the church is Wesley's house. I had a chance to go in Wesley's bedroom; they said Wesley died in that small room at the age of 88.

When I was there, there were several people with me in that room. But I didn't care what other people thought! I knelt on the floor; I wanted to touch his bed; I wanted to smell something; it was very emotional experience for me.

They said Wesley was short in height—5 feet tall.

But he was never a small man.

In the 18th century, he saved the whole country of England and the world; John Wesley is one of the biggest names in human history. His ministry was simple: save souls with God's word—preaching was his thing. But he was not just a preacher; he was a social reformer and social worker too—he deeply cared about the poor. That's why I call him a big man.

But I was very surprised last week: his bedroom was very small; there were not many items; a bed and small desk. That was it.

A short man with big heart; a humble life but big impact on other people's lives: to him, the world was his parish.

What a man!

Jesus said "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

Folks! Life may be short but what we do together for God will never be forgotten. Let's remember who we are as God's people and remind

ourselves of our calling: God is asking us to live a life worthy of the calling to which we are called. Amen.