

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace, from God our Father
and from our Lord and Saviors Jesus Christ... Amen**

Beginning last week, and continuing for three more weeks we have gospel readings from John; and all focusing on Jesus as the bread of life. The traditional symbol of the gospel of John is the eagle, and like the eagle, I like to think of John as soaring and seeing a big picture; powerful and full of layers upon layers of meaning and metaphors.

What I'd like to do this morning is reflect on that symbol of Jesus as the bread of life. Specifically, what does that mean? And how do we experience that today?

Interestingly, in our reading, Jesus starts out being a little critical of those who were clamoring to see him. Jesus tells them, that they weren't so much interested in him, as much as they were looking for an easy meal. Jesus wanted them to know he wasn't just an ATM machine delivering bread on demand; and he used that opportunity as a teaching moment to talk about his own ministry as life giving sustenance, symbolized by being the bread of life.

In other words, for Jesus, we're no longer talking about a food that nourishes the body; we are talking about a food that nourishes the soul. And of course that bread, that nourishment is Jesus, himself. Jesus in all the ways we experience his teaching, his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his healing, his compassion... Perhaps we could think of that in terms of bread that is saving, eternal, deeply satisfying and fulfilling and meaningful. It's probably impossible to comprehend all the ways that Jesus nourishes us. I imagine each and every one of you, and at different times in your lives have experienced Jesus in a poignant way. And it's good to occasionally reflect on those experiences.

What I'd like to do this morning is add some content to the idea of Jesus as the bread of life. I'd like to describe one way that's been helpful for me to think about it. And maybe, you might find it helpful too...

When I was in Seminary, I had the opportunity to study under a professor who had been a student of Viktor Frankl's. Frankl was a Jewish Holocaust survivor. He also happened to be a psychiatrist and educated in Europe's medical tradition, which included philosophy. His experiences of living in a concentration camp shaped him profoundly.

In fact, Frankl wrote an anonymous best seller in the 70's call Man's Search for Meaning. Where he talked about his experiences living in the concentration camp, again-- not good bed time reading. It's a miracle that he survived. His wife and daughter were not so lucky...

The fundamental thing that Frankl came to understand, was that we are not so much motivated by pleasure or power, as much as we are motivated by meaning, to have a meaningful life. He would say that the reason we get out of bed every day is to make our lives meaningful.

Frankl observed in the concentration camp, that people, who lost their will to live, despaired of not having any meaning in their lives.

This whole idea of having a meaningful life was helpful for me, because everything Jesus does and talks about is all about living a deeply meaningful life, or as the bible calls it, abundant life.

Frankl believed that there are three ways that we experience meaning in our lives. I think of them as Projects, People, and Attitudes; Projects, People and Attitudes.

Projects are those things that make the world a better place. The things we create, the goals and objectives we achieve—things that make a difference in the world. Like feeding the five thousand...

Quick story – After college I worked as an administrator in a large group home in St Paul. I'd go to work, and argue with the owners, argue with the staff, argue with the social workers, argue with the licensors, just argue, and argue and I often wondered, did it really make any difference in anyone's life?

I remember going home some days, thinking that the only thing I accomplished was getting through another day. It just felt empty and meaningless...

After resigning and staying home to raise kids. I started to build furniture. And oh my goodness! The first thing I made was a little pine hutch, it wasn't special at all, but I made it!

I would sit and admire it, it was useful, and if you had come over to our house at that time, you would have thought I was nuts the way I talked about it. It felt so good to actually make something that was tangible and real!

Making that hutch was healing for me; it was like medicine for a deeply compromised soul... It was just a little thing, but it meant so much.

All work is meaningful, because it makes a difference in the world. When Jesus says pick up your cross and follow me, he means we are to serve one another and by doing that we create meaningful lives for ourselves and others. Making a difference in the world is one way we experience Jesus as the bread of life.

The second thing that Frankl says that we find meaningful is relationships; like our relationships with our families and friends. And perhaps one of the most primary relationships we all have is with God. We experience relationships in context, as our life and story is entangled with others; we come to appreciate how very unique we all are.

As we get older, we get a sense of how exceptional and distinctive our lives have been. There will never, ever be another person just like you. And through all those relationships we come to experience our lives as deeply connected and meaningful. Jesus teaches that we are to love God and love our neighbor. Relationships are another way we experience Jesus as the bread of life.

And finally, the third way we experience meaning is through the attitudes we adopt toward the suffering we will endure. That's a little harder to explain. To be human means to suffer... God doesn't promise us a perfect life with no suffering, God promises to be with us, and especially in the midst of suffering. Jesus knows all about suffering, he died on a cross...

The real point of this is not so much about avoiding suffering, as much as it has everything to do with *how* we suffer.

Some of the most sacred experiences I've had in ministry are when I've walked with people on their final journey. Families often surround their loved one, caring and paying attention. And when we pass away full of love and kindness with faith and hope, we pass that graciousness along to the others who are present with us. And it gives them strength. And that's incredibly meaningful!

As Jesus is being nailed to cross, he said "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus is forgiving... even to the people who are killing him...

So you see, how we live, and even how we die can be meaningful. And this meaning stuff, this **projects, people and attitudes** is one way I like to think of Jesus as the bread of life. This is what Jesus is all about... This is the stuff that nourishes the soul. This is the stuff of eternal life; where no moth or rust can consume. This deeply meaningful life is abundant life and safely stored away in God's memory for eternity.

There's a spiritual paradox at work in all of this, and it all centers around being of service to others. It's exactly here in picking up our cross and following him, that we lose ourselves in service and in the process discover a deeply rich and meaningful life. The paradox is that when we lose ourselves in service to others, we actually find ourselves. Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes, work can be the best therapy for someone who is depressed...

And as Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

And my friends, this is not some hocus pocus Christian wishful thinking, this is absolute truth and I believe it not only because I've experienced it myself, I've seen it in others. This is genuine, authentic, and as real life as it could possibly be.

The good news today is that Jesus is the bread of life. He shows us a path toward a deeply meaningful life, a life that nourishes the soul and sustains our community.

As we celebrate communion this morning, Jesus continues to offer himself to us, and because of that self giving, we too are inspired to give of ourselves to others.

And by losing ourselves in service, we find ourselves in ways we never imagined. And it's all God's work in and through our deeply connected and meaningful lives. And to God be the Glory... Amen