

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

We're still in the 6th chapter of John and focusing on Jesus as the bread of life. And our reading today almost seems startling. Jesus is telling a large group of others, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood..." These words appear in six different ways in seven short verses.

The people hearing him talk that way must have been scratching their heads, wondering "what in the world is he talking about..." Can you imagine?

Of course, Jesus is speaking metaphorically, and they are listening to him literally... And of course, we all know that Jesus is referring to what will become holy communion. And these words in Chapter 6, are the closest thing we have to referencing communion in the whole gospel of John.

During the passion week, Matthew, Mark and Luke give us the words of institution, "In the Night in which he was betrayed..." In other words, the last supper, or communion.

In the gospel of John, during the passion week we have Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Some scholars have suggested that John, was advocating that foot washing also become a sacrament. In fact, in some traditions, foot washing actually became part of the communion liturgy or a part of the baptismal ritual.

Luther preached at length on the powerful symbol of foot washing; a symbol of humility and service. So, it's not a part of our sacramental practice, but we do set aside a whole day during passion week to talk about it, Maundy Thursday, the new commandment that we serve others.

So far in our series of Jesus as the bread of life, we've talked about how the teachings of Jesus make our lives meaningful, we've also talked about how Jesus nourishes our souls through forgiveness and this morning I'd like to reflect with how Jesus nourishes our souls with love.

A little longer story this morning... Almost thirteen years ago I started as the Director of Older Adult Ministry at St Olaf in Austin. I think the first week I was there, Jack and Elaine invited me over to their house for supper, and we became wonderful friends.

I was the recipient of their hospitality, and love for many years. And for that I will always be grateful. And I tell this story in honor of Jack, and Elaine has given me permission to tell this story everywhere I go.

Jack was my kind of character. He was a pipe smokin, bible readin, walleye fishin, teacher of the year, he was passionate about teaching! His claim to fame, was that he caught a record sized walleye up in Canada one year, but because he was fishing and not at a conference like he was supposed to be, he couldn't be in the record books!

Every Monday morning for years he attended a bible study I led at his apartment complex. Jack had been trained in the Bethel series bible course and was a certified instructor. He knew his bible forward and backward.

He loved to ask questions he knew I didn't know the answers for, and so I always had a few trivia questions of my own... It was always good fun...

Jack had diabetes since he was a little kid. It was a miracle he lived as long as he did. He struggled with neuropathy and had some amputations along the way. About four years ago he started to have more and more health problems. I'd see him in the hospital, at the care centers, back home, back to the care centers... We had many, many conversations about the health difficulties he was experiencing.

And I have to say, Jack was one of the more "wholistic" person's I've ever known. When faced with a scary diagnosis, he had a way of keeping things in perspective. He had a "life giving" way about him. He could transform fear into faith and disease into wisdom.

And whenever I met Jack in the hospital, he was always eager to tell me what he was experiencing. And I have to say that I always felt blessed; blessed to give witness to the faith God had given him, and blessed to receive his wisdom.

As his health was progressively getting worse, Jack and I spent more time together. He was always wrestling with that question of quality of time verses quantity of time.

I met with Jack after the decision to go into hospice. He talked about the dying process quite openly, he had no fear, he talked about his death being an opportunity; to be an example of faith-- to give others strength and hope. Jack, always the teacher, wanted me to know how he was going to be "life giving" even through death.

At one particular meeting, Jack became emotional, he said, "We make things so complicated, but there's really only one thing that matters, and it's so clear and simple- love, we must always find ways to love one another." We must always find ways to love one another... I felt like I was on Holy ground...

We talk a lot about Love in the church. Love is never jealous or envious, or boastful or proud, and love just has this amazing quality of spilling over in abundance. Love drives out fear, and love finds creative ways to connect and include. Jack was a man with a big heart, a heart for his wife, his family, his community. This was just Jack's way of being in the world. It was his DNA...

And the good news today is that this is what God accomplishes through us. As we abide in His love, we are directed outward to love our neighbor. We reach out in faith, to love and care for those around us. Some of us, like Jack, become teachers.

But in whatever profession-- business, health care, farming, even our activities in retirement, it doesn't matter-- we do it, because we care for and love our neighbor. It's God's work and our hands...

Love is the energy that brings this creation into existence. And it's all God's work. And it all pours out through us... It's one of the ways we participate with God in the unfolding of creation still going on- all around us—and all the time.

Jack got it right. We make it all so complicated; it's just all about love.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Emmanuel, God with us, is the God who comes to us, always taking the first step, always climbing down the ladder to be with us, always inviting, always encouraging, always loving, always forgiving-- even those who crucified Him. God is always coming down and reaching for us... We make it all so complicated; but it's just all about love.

Sometimes we have experiences of God's love that are intense and make it difficult for us to describe. Jack was proud of his Scottish heritage. Just a few days before he passed away, his son arranged for a gentleman, a Scot I presume, to come and play the bag pipes at the apartment complex. Bag pipes are a tradition at Scottish funerals. Jack said if they were going to pay someone to play the bag pipes, he wanted to hear it...

I will always remember Jack's face as he entered the room; tears of joy and love for his family and friends. This is the stuff of a loving God. Not a dry eye in the place. There was nothing to say, just hugs to be shared. I still have a picture of that day in my bible.

Jack made it his personal mission in that last chapter of his life to tell everyone he saw that he loved them. Family, friends...

A few days later Jack passed away surrounded by his family. His wife, Elaine told me that right before he passed away he opened his eyes and said, "Is this Heaven, it's so beautiful." Elaine asked me, "Do you think he was in heaven?" I said, "I think he's been in heaven ever since he started telling everyone how much he loved them." Elaine smiled and said, "I think so too."

Jack's funeral was huge. And always the teacher, Jack had taught us not only how to live, and also how to die. He dwelled in God's love. His life was a testament to how Jesus nourishes us with love. As St. Paul said, "So faith, hope, and love remain, but the greatest of these is love."

The God that Jesus points us to, is a God who loves us unconditionally. And I believe it because I've seen it... One more way Jesus nourishes our souls, He is indeed the bread of life... Amen...