

August 1, 2021

Beginning last week with the feeding of the five thousand, and continuing for three more weeks we have gospel readings from John; and all focusing on Jesus as the bread of life.

In our reading today, 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...

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— through his teaching, his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his healing, and compassion... What I'd like to do today is add some content to the idea of Jesus as that soul nurturing bread of life.

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. His experiences of living in a concentration camp shaped him profoundly.

In the 70's he wrote about those experiences in a little book called *Man's Search for Meaning*—it was a best seller at the time and believe me, 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 experience some kind of meaning.

Frankl observed in the concentration camp, that people, who lost their will to live, despaired because they had no 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.

Quick story... This past week my kids were home and I took the week off to re-connect and enjoy their company. We did a lot of fun activities, it was great! One thing that happened was eating out of the garden! Gardens are always a project---lots of hard work, of tilling, planting and weeding...

This past week there were lots of zucchini, and green beans! And it was very meaningful for me, to have planted that garden and to share the produce with my kids. 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.

The second thing that Frankl says that we find meaningful is relationships... Like my relationship with my kids! Sure, the garden was hard work, and the work itself was meaningful... But it was particularly meaningful to me because I shared it with my kids!

Through 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.

The third way we experience meaning is through the attitudes we adopt toward the suffering we will endure. To be human means to suffer... God doesn't promise us an easy life, God promises to be with us, and especially in the midst of suffering. And 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. It gives others strength, and that's meaningful!

So you see, how we live, and even how we die can be meaningful. And this meaning stuff, is one way I like to think of Jesus as nourishment for our souls – the bread of life.

There's a spiritual paradox at work in all of this. When we lose ourselves in service to others, we actually find ourselves. We discover that abundant and meaningful life...

And my friends, this is not 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 can possibly be.

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." Truer words have never been spoken! Amen...