

**August 15, 2021**

We're still in our series focusing on Jesus as the bread of life. And our reading today is startling. Jesus says, "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, we all know that Jesus is referring to what will become holy communion.

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 quick story... Sixteen 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.

Jack was my kind of character. He was a pipe smokin, bible readin, walleye fishin, teacher of the year kind of guy... His claim to fame, was that he caught a record sized walleye up in Canada one year, but because he was supposed to be at a conference, nobody could know about it, he couldn't be in the record books!

Every Monday morning for years we had a bible study at his apartment complex. We just became good friends...

Jack had suffered with diabetes since he was a little kid. It was a miracle he lived as long as he did. After a series of health failures, Jack eventually made the difficult decision to enter hospice.

I met with him shortly after that decision... 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.

At one point, 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...

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

Jack then made it his personal mission in that last chapter of his life to tell everyone he saw that he loved them. Family, friends, everyone, didn't matter...

His wife, Elaine told me that right before he passed away, Jack 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."

Jesus, Emmanuel, is God with us... Taking the first step, always climbing down the ladder to be with us, holding our hands, always encouraging, promising hope... Through Jesus, God shows up and proves that he loves us!

After sixteen years in ministry, and contemplating retirement... This "love thing," is becoming a deal for me... It's what I'll be remembering. I'll remember last

Tuesday morning, meeting at church for the Welca bible study and snookering Millie... We surprised her and went to her place to celebrate her new house...

I'll remember people going above and beyond, doing all the work behind the scenes... Thankless jobs, and all for the love of the community! You know who you are!

I'll remember the confirmation kids playing ukulele, and playing Sweet Home Minnesota...

I'll remember the Saints who have gone before us, proclaiming the promise of resurrection and eternal life... And sharing that hope together...

I'll remember the Baptisms, moms and dads splashing water, washing the New Saints...

I'll remember people fixing and building and pulling weeds... Loving these buildings... I'll remember people being generous to missions!

I'll certainly remember the pandemic! I'll forever remember how strong and resilient we were! I'll remember people singing into cell phones and learning how to upload... I'll remember people learning how to do video editing and getting it on the internet... I'll remember Jeff wearing shorts on one song and then a tuxedo on the next!

So many people, helping out in so many ways... Exactly because, we are the church, we love God and we love one another...

And frankly, I believe in this love stuff, because I've seen it, and so have you!

One more way, Jesus nourishes our souls, He is indeed the bread of life...

Amen...