

August 19, 2018

## Prayer

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Sermon

One of the earliest memories of my life growing up in Jacksonville goes back to a time when I was about three or four years old. It's a treasured memory and experience I had with Poppa. Poppa was my mother's father. He was a kindly and easy-going man which was quite a contrast to my grandmother who was a very strict disciplinarian.

One day while Poppa and grandmother were staying with us. He took me for a walk past the big oak trees in our yard down to the river, so that we could watch a ship go by. We lived on the Saint John's river and I loved watching the ships go by. Whenever I saw them coming I would run down to the river and wave. And I would be absolutely thrilled whenever the ships blew their whistles, their horns in response. Horns that shook the air as the deep blasts reverberated across the water.

Anyway, Poppa took me down to the river to watch. After the ship passed, he let me climb my favorite tree. A sturdy little oak with a low branch that went out over the riverbank. When I finished climbing, we sat down at an old wooden picnic table. And he pulled out an orange. My very favorite fruit in the whole world. And then he pulled out his pocket knife and opened it up and began peeling the rind off of that orange.

My eyes grew big as I watched Poppa. And I asked, "Poppa, whose it for?" Poppa said not a word. He just kept peeling. And when he had finished I watched him pull off a juicy plug of that orange. And then he dangled it over my mouth. Gently teasing me until he dropped it in.

Again, and again, he fed me the orange, plug by plug. Until the whole orange was mine. Mine to taste. Mine to savor. Mine to enjoy. Mine to remember forever.

Not only the orange but the whole experience was Poppa's gift to me. It was a beautiful gift and it was a gift of grace. It was a pure gift of grace because as a small child there was no way in the world I could ever peel that orange for myself. There was no way I could taste its sweetness or savor its juices until Poppa gave it to me as a gift.

I still remember the kind look on his face. The little smile of joy in his eyes as I eagerly ask, "Poppa, who's it for?" And I could still remember the experience. And still experience it through that memory. The joy of a child's heart as I learn that the gift was for me.

In today's gospel, as Jesus continues his bread of life discourse, we hear Jesus say I am the bread of life. As Jesus says these words, he is talking about grace. He's talking about gift. God's kingdom is a gift. We do not earn it. We do not reach out and grab hold of it and take it for ourselves. God's kingdom is a gift given to us wrapped up in bread and washed down with wine.

You see the synthesis on grace as we look closely at the imagery Jesus uses in his bread of life discourse. Bread is important to us. We frequently have as part of a meal. And we grab bread to make a sandwich when we're hungry and in a hurry. But while bread is important to us. It is what we might call trivial importance. We have it and we enjoy it. But we have so much more.

In Jesus's day, however, bread was a lot more than something that was thrown in to have an extra to add into the meal. Bread was the heart of the meal. Many times, it was the whole meal. Bread was indeed the staff of life. Even today at that part of the world, pita bread is served at

every meal. People use the bread not only for sustenance, but they use it as an implement for eating. Much like we use a fork and a spoon. In that part of the world, most people do not put forks or spoons in their mouths because the culture and faith believe that anything put in the mouth other than food defiles it. Because it is forbidden by their religious traditions. To break these rules is not only uncivilized, it is a sacrilege.

So instead of using utensils, they use bread. When they eat they use it to pick up a morsel of meat or a piece of vegetable to put in their mouths. And then eat. The only way they can get to the main dish ... The only way they can get to the main course is with bread. As we look at the culture and the traditions of the middle east, we begin to see how important bread is for them. Often times it is the only thing they have to eat. And even in those times when they have something more. It is the only way they have to eat it. Keep that in mind as we focus on these words of Jesus.

Given that what does Jesus mean when he says, "I am the bread of life." In this powerful imagery Jesus is teaching us that not only is he the main course of the banquet of God's kingdom. He is the only way we can partake of the Heavenly feast. He is not only the food, he is also the means. He is the implement by which we receive the food of God's kingdom.

Want to take a bite from God's table of grace? You can't without Jesus. Think you can sneak in and go up to the table and grab a piece of God's bounty for yourself. Nope, not until you have Jesus first. Jesus is not only the feast of God's kingdom. He is the means by which we are able to partake of the feast of God's table. In this gift of Jesus, God our heavenly Poppa not only gives us something to eat, bread and wine, body and blood. He gives us a means to remember. In sacraments of

the Holy Communion, he gives us a way to celebrate his love poured out for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his son, our Lord. We may not be able to understand all the nuances and words and images of Jesus which are shared with us from the discourse in the sixth chapter of John's gospel. But we never forget the gift and we never forget the love that is given to us in the sacrifice of Christ.

Prayer

May that peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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