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Love People Use Things

How many of you have heard of minimalism? I first heard of minimalism, as a “movement”, when I watched the Netflix Documentary entitled *Minimalism: A Documentary About The Important Things*, a couple of years ago. And I was fascinated not only by the statistics on consumerism, but also by all the ways in which people took on this lifestyle. Like a young family of five who live happily, harmoniously, and comfortably in a 675 sq. ft. apartment. Because, what everyone in the film who had taken on minimalism unanimously agreed upon was that they felt as though their commitment to live with less stuff as individuals gave them the ability to be more fully present to others and the world.

I don't think it would be a stretch to suggest (as I have heard it said before) that our consumerist culture has created an almost secular religion around the need to obtain stuff. In fact companies and advertisers depend on, and rake in billions of dollars because of this. Using tactics like “deficit advertising,” where commercials and advertisements make their way into our subconscious urging us to feel as though without “this” product in our lives we are insufficient and inadequate. And, because our consumerist culture is driven in large part by advertising and social media we have inadvertently created a perpetual background noise of insufficiency. That is constantly bombarding our thoughts and feelings, telling us we aren't enough, we aren't complete, we aren't happy until we make our next purchase.

Now, I will pause to say, I am not a minimalist, anyone who has seen the amount of toys in our home, or my wardrobe could easily tell you we do not live with less. And, I certainly wouldn't say it is wrong to buy things, or even enjoy them, because I love a new pair of shoes. But, I won't say I am not intrigued by the idea of minimalism. As I am a huge fan of decluttering and purging, and I try and do so as often as our family lets us. Because, I have found that the less stuff we have to keep track of, clean up after, or take care of, the more time we have for what is truly important in life, people. Which is why I think I have been drawn to minimalism, and what I loved about the documentary. As I heard people say over and over again that overconsumption had led them to ignore, in some cases even exploit the people around them. To feed what these individuals had defined as a destructive appetite for more things. And, that once they were able to assess what they really NEEDED, and let go of what they didn't. They gained freedom, contentment, and a better appreciation for the world, and most importantly, the people around them. In each one of these individuals journeys towards minimalisms was a story of a renewed sense, or newly found connection, to others and community.

In our Gospel today we continue in our Bread of Life discourse, as the crowd, who has just been fed by Jesus at the feeding of the 5,000 is now searching for and chasing after him. As Jesus says

to them, “you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” And, we know this to be true, because right after Jesus tells them “not [to] work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.” They ask for another sign, so that they can be SURE that what he is saying is true. As if turning 5 loaves and 3 fish into enough to feed an army with leftovers, and walking on water to reach his disciples in the middle of the sea, wasn’t enough. And, so it is with the human condition (or at least, as I am told by my husband often, it is with me), we always want more. Equanimity always feels either out of reach or like a fantasy, sold to you by the flimflam man. And, while the crowds may not truly grasp the miracles Jesus offers them, or the ideas surrounding the bread of life, their yearning, desire, and prayer to obtain it is the first step. As they say “give us this bread always,” they, like us, begin their journey towards obtaining the fullness Jesus is offering. A fullness that may begin with the physical opportunity to share a good meal, but goes beyond our continued need to satiate hunger by consuming more and more. Because the bread of life is not only consumed, but also shared.

It is interesting to note that the Gospel of John, whose book our passage comes from today, does not have any account of a last supper. Instead for John our Eucharistic celebration, our call to communion with one another to give and eat the bread of life, is instituted in all the ways that Jesus lived and shared his life with the world. The two individuals, Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus, who created the *Minimalists* documentary, have created a motto they now live by that informs why they became minimalists and spurs them to continue on this journey. Which is, “love people, use things,” because the opposite never works. As Jesus tells us he is the bread of life, and in turn invites and encourages us to partake of that bread of life, he in turn invites us to also become that bread. Just as we partake of the body of Christ every Sunday, so to do we become the body of Christ. And this is where we receive our life to the fullest. As we are able to have all needs, wants, and desires satiated more and more, everyday by Jesus Christ. The divine that dwells at the center of each and everyone of our lives. The Divine that desires to fill us so that we will never thirst or hunger, for anything other than continued and shared connection to and love for God, one another, and ourselves.