

Pentecost 10B, July 28, 2024. Faith Episcopal Church, Poulsbo, WA. 2 Samuel 11:1-15, Psalm 14, Ephesians 3:14-21, John 6:1-21

The Gospel

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

The Sermon

Maybe you’ve been there. Kids playing at your house. It’s lunch time. There’s peanut butter and a half loaf of bread. Enough for four kids to have a sandwich, but there are 5 kids there – and, yes, you should eat too. So you make the four sandwiches and cut them into triangles rather than giving each kid a whole sandwich. The kids are having so much fun playing that they only eat some of the

triangles, you get a couple for yourself, and the rest can be packaged up for tomorrow. A miracle, you think.

We've all been there, one way or another. Will our savings stretch through our years of retirement? Will our offerings cover our expenses and let us even consider a new stove for the fellowship hall, or, more wildly yet, a new roof for this building? Will our medical regimen work or will we need more or different medications? Will the wars of the world ever end? Will we ever be able to feed the hungry people here and abroad?

When we are up against scarcity, how do we learn to trust? When our cares and doubts trouble us, how do we learn to let God be God, and to live freely in each moment? We can tell each other that God's abundance is always enough, but do we believe it?

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When Jesus blessed the five meager barley loaves – barley the coarsest and cheapest grain back then – when Jesus took and distributed the loaves to the crowd, he portrayed the abundant grace that he will soon provide for all people on the cross. It's really NOT about how much we worry or work, but rather what God will do through Jesus that matters. With Jesus, God gives us eternal life. Today is one more blessed day in that eternity.

Jesus created a banquet in the mountainous wilderness, a Holy Eucharist, a feast of abundance and thanksgiving. This is the only place that St. John describes Communion; there is no other mention of it in his Gospel. And this is one of the few stories that all four of the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, include in their books.

For the next 4 weeks, we will be hearing the so-called "Bread of Life" Gospel stories from John. One preacher called these five weeks the "Breadapalooza". You may get tired of hearing the stories. Some are not easy to hear. But each week I trust we will find something new to take home with us.

Alongside these Bread stories we are also hearing the Hebrew scripture stories of David and Solomon and their children, their sins, their wisdom. Today we heard David's lowest and saddest chapter. The mighty king was bored and fell into the sins of lust, rape, dishonest conniving, and murder. His leadership style contrasts strongly with that of Jesus in today's Gospel.

The people whom Jesus has fed with bread and fish are so excited for that mountaintop picnic that they want to make him their king. That's NOT Jesus' intention or style. He slipped away from them and went further up the mountain by himself. He avoided the public acclamation and returned to his place of prayer.

We love the Shepherd King David stories, but they are not always good models for us. Rather we seek to model our lives on Jesus, the humble servant. We look to our leaders for the qualities Jesus models.

And we find that in the times of pressure, Jesus – beloved son of our Creator – brother and friend – is the one we cling to for guidance and hope.

This story of feeding 5000 people is an example of God accomplishing in us “far more than all we can ask or imagine.” Our loaves and fishes and peanut butter sandwiches have been multiplied and will be again. Our spiritual hunger has been fed and will be again.

Yes, our parish hall stove can't be used. So our Monday team has found ways to use crock pots and electric frying pans to continue to provide hot lunches to our Monday guests. When you volunteer and support that Fresh Start program, you are the hands and blessings of Jesus: giving so that others can eat and shower and have clean clothes. When you donate to the churchwide hunger programs, you help provide for people across the world.

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A church once lost its treasurer – as we will through resignation in December. They could not convince anyone in the congregation to take over the job. There was never enough money to pay the bills and so the job was not a happy one. It was a farming community, and the owner of the grain elevator offered to take the job on one condition: there would be no records or reports for the first year.

At the end of the year, all the bills had been paid and there was money left over. People were thrilled, but some asked him how he had managed. Few if any had contributed more money than usual that year.

“Well,” he said, “each of you brings your grain to me. I just kept 10% of everyone's grain in a special account and used it to support the work of the church. None of you ever noticed. You have prospered, the church has prospered. I suggest we do it again next year.”

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That would not work here, nor is it honest, but it's a good story. I suggest we each try to offer 10% of our earnings to the good of the church and our neighbor. Some of you already do that and you know the joy of giving.

Importantly, too, we need to find a church treasurer who will take up the job beginning in January. I lay that need upon your hearts as well.

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When Jesus met up with his terrified disciples in the storm, he comforted them with the words, "It is I; do not be afraid." Such important words!

"It is I" in Greek is *ego eimi*, the Greek name used in the Hebrew scriptures for God: I am...I am. By saying those words in that way, Jesus connected himself with the Creator, the Spirit, the Divine.

And "do not be afraid" are words used by angels when bringing important messages from God. It's the best advice we can hear and take to heart when we worry if there will be enough. Enough retirement savings, enough medical care, enough income, enough young people to carry our church into the next century, enough church leaders to guide, enough volunteers to make our outreach work, enough money to fix our roof.

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In the Gospel story, a little boy, who doesn't know any better, offers what he has, and it is more than enough.

Praise God for this young person. Praise his parents who taught him to share. Praise St. John for remembering to write down this boy's story. Praise the Holy Spirit who worked in all of them.

Jesus TOOK the young man's small lunch— just as he accepts the small gifts we bring, the small faith we offer.

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I read about a family who drove by a park where numerous people were camping. Their four-year old daughter asked about the people. The mother answered, "They are homeless. They have no place to sleep. They have nothing to eat." "Well, why don't we just feed them?" asked the daughter. "Why don't we just feed them?"

Jesus' disciples, like the girl's mother and most of us, determined that feeding the crowd is an impossible task. "We don't have enough money."

The boy said, "Here's some food. Feed them."

And they were fed “as much as they wanted.” Jesus doesn’t ask if they should be fed, only how.

With Jesus we have more than enough of God’s abundant grace, and that means we have nothing to fear; we can share Jesus and his abundance with our neighbors because we will never run out.

As we gather around the table of the Lord this morning, we hear how Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and gave it. When we despair of doing enough, having enough faith, conquering our troubles, healing the world, Jesus draws us close and says, “I have faith enough.” And we walk away from the table with the profound hope that Jesus can use us to make a difference. We are strengthened to feed one another with generosity, with friendship, and with God’s good bounty. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Outtake:

Children’s sermon: The pastor was teaching his confirmation class about Holy Communion. He said the Bible calls it a “joyful feast.” Joyful, he said, means happy. Feast is a meal. What do we need for a happy meal? The kids answered a burger, fries and a medium drink.....

It went downhill from there. 😊