

Tenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B): "Cared For, Both Body & Soul"

John 6:15-21

July 27-28, 2024

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Amazingly, there is only one child who appears in the entire 4th Gospel, and he's the little boy in today's feeding of the 5,000. St. John doesn't mention Jesus' healing or raising the daughter of Jairus (Mk. 5:21-43, Matt. 9:18-26, Lk. 8:40-56), or His raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), or His healing of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (Mk. 7:24-30, Matt. 15:21-28). He tells no stories about the birth or infancy of our Lord Jesus or of John the Baptist, and says nothing about 12-year-old Jesus teaching in the temple (Lk. 2:41-52). There's just one kid. Maybe he's a Boy Scout, because he is **well-prepared**, apparently more so than most adults in the crowd.

So imagine: how does this little boy (St. John used a specific word for a **small** child) feel about his lunch being confiscated by big people he's never met before??

- He could feel proud and useful.
- He could feel annoyed.
- He could be afraid he won't get any lunch at all....
- He could wonder where everybody else's lunch is!

We've probably had those kinds of feelings, too, along the Way: when the Lord has called on us to share our lunch, our time, our talent, our treasure. We can think:

- "I'm blessed to have something valuable to offer! The gift I have to give God and God's people was first given **to** me by God. "
- Or I can be annoyed because the timing of "the ask" is inconvenient, or because "Yes, I'm capable of doing what you're asking, but it's not really 'following my bliss.'"
- Or I can be afraid if I give too generously of my time, talent, treasure, I'll be left without.
- Or I can wonder, "Why do they keep asking **me**???" "I seem to be doing a lot around here, and others, not so much."

But what we might call "self-emptying" was simply "Standard Operating Procedure" for Jesus. For instance, there's a reason Jesus took His disciples on a boat ride to the **other** side of the Sea of Galilee. I can only guess he was hoping to slow down from what had become the frantic pace of His ministry, to find refreshment after the intense and exhausting work of healing people, to let the water table of His

soul come up again. But the crowds follow Him. He's just sat down, settling in for a little break in the action, when He looks up and sees hordes of people headed His way. He's concerned not just for their **souls**, but for their **bodies**, which is why He invested a lot of time making the crippled whole and the sick well, enabling the lame to walk and the blind to see. Jesus shows us **we** should be concerned about people's physical well-being, too. It's why we donate tuna and peanut butter, paper towels and juice to the food pantry, why we pass along men's winter coats to the Jersey Shore Rescue Mission in Asbury Park, why Social Ministry is preparing health kits for Lutheran World Relief, and why we send money to Lutheran Disaster Response for those who suffer from natural disaster or war. Jesus was and is concerned about people's **physical** as well as spiritual needs, and calls us to share His concern.

In the crowds converging on Him Jesus doesn't just see **curiosity seekers** and down-on-their-luck, sick people. He sees **hungry** people. He sees a need and acts to meet it. But He doesn't do it alone. He involves **us**. He deputizes us to be His helping hands, His compassionate heart. St. John says that Jesus "tests" Philip by asking him, "*Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?*" (John 6:5c) Did Philip pass the test?? Well, he basically answers Jesus, "Are you nuts?? 'No way can we feed **all** these people – or **most** of them – or even **some** of them, really. We don't have money. And even if we did, where's the supermarket?" Andrew wants to please Jesus (and get a good grade on the "test" Philip just flunked) so he presents a little boy with a big lunch. He sheepishly admits, "*But what are they among so many people?*" (John 6: 9b), not realizing that 5 loaves and 2 fish were going to be multiplied into history's largest picnic. In John's telling of the story, unlike in Matthew, Mark and Luke's, Jesus Himself distributes the miraculously multiplied food. Jesus feeds the hungry. By God's grace, what is on hand is miraculously **enough**, when given lovingly and prayerfully to meet others' need. Our summer prayer of confession helps us honestly admit:

God, our provider,
help us.
It is hard to believe there is enough to share.

The absolution assures us:

Beloved people of God:
 in Jesus, the manna from heaven, you are fed and nourished.
 By Jesus, the worker of miracles, **there is always more than enough.**

Our generosity grows when we trust that is true.

Another very strange sequence follows, in which the now well-fed crowd wants to crown Jesus king. He's not a Messiah who's going to provide bread and circuses, though, any more than He's a Messiah who's going to raise an army and overthrow the Romans. The best thing He can do for the moment is disappear, like when the neighbors at His home synagogue wanted to throw Him off a cliff. Jesus discretely returns to the mountain where the crowd first found Him, and a little while later, after the sun has set, His disciples inexplicably leave Him behind, setting out to return to Galilee on the other side of the lake. How did they expect Him to get home again??

In St. John's Gospel night is never just night. (In my opinion, the most chilling verse in Scripture comes in St. John's follow-up to Judas' departure from the Last Supper to go and lead the religious leaders and soldiers to find and arrest Jesus: "It was night.") The darkness of night is the opposite of light and always symbolizes the benighted ways of the world, life without God. The disciples are in darkness in more ways than one, as they row their boat across the increasing waves, driven high by storm winds. They're in the middle of the lake when they witness something so amazing they may have discounted it, except they all see the same thing: their Master walking on the waves, headed their way.

This is the only point in St. John's Gospel when we're told the disciples are **terrified**. Jesus' response? *"It is I; do not be afraid."* (John 6:20b) *"It is I"* is the same language Jesus uses in this Gospel to reveal He is:

- The light of the world
- The bread of life
- The Good Shepherd
- The resurrection and the life
- The vine
- The way, the truth and the life....

He's not just saying, "Hey, remember Me??" He's telling them who He is on a deeper level, on a divine level. He's revealing His glory, like in a Transfiguration scene (which John doesn't recount), so that this **isn't** a nature miracle, like the calming of the storm at sea – it's an outright theophany, the showing forth of God's glory. In Hebrew Scripture, the psalms and elsewhere, God is depicted as walking on water.... No coincidence that Jesus does so here. Jesus reveals Himself to bless His disciples with the realization that **when He is with them there is nothing to fear**. He's fed their bodies with bread and fish, and now He feeds their souls by calming their anxiety and teaching them the power of His presence. One Bible scholar has described this as "a moment of glory for the sake of grace... in order to allay their fears, to ensure them safe passage, to remind them God has been, is, and will be their rescue. Jesus' glory is not revealed for power, but for grace-filled pastoral care."¹

Take-aways today? Jesus cares for us, both body and soul. Jesus calls on us to care for each other, both body and soul. And the presence of Jesus is enough to allay [our] fears, to ensure [us] safe passage, to remind [us] God has been, is, and will be their rescue.

Through Jesus, ✝ the bread of life, you are shown God's mercy:
you are forgiven and loved into abundant life. Amen

¹*New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 597.

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