

10th Sunday after Pentecost
August 1, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 6:1-15
More Than a Bread King

John 6:1–15 (NIV84)

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the last 150 years or so, it has become somewhat common for theologians of the Bible to come up with alternative explanations for the miracles of Jesus. There have always been and will always be people who deny the supernatural and thus deny all miracles. But strangely, these people want to hold on to parts of the Bible. Thomas Jefferson literally cut out the supernatural parts from his Bible. The story before us has been explained by such theologians as a story about sharing. You see, they tell us that once the little boy shared his lunch, the others in the crowd brought out their lunches and everyone shared. That is how Jesus turned five loaves and two fish into 12 baskets of leftovers. Everyone who had some food hidden in a pocket shared with the others.

Now, that would be a nice story about sharing that one could find in a book of fables, like Aesop’s fables. But John does not present this to us today as a lesson on sharing. The people want to force Jesus to be their king after he feeds them. My kindergarten teacher taught our class about sharing but we never tried to get her elected as the president. What Jesus did here was something the people had never seen before. It was supernatural and a sign for them to know who Jesus is. As we examine this true account of the feeding of the 5,000 by Christ, we see him as a great teacher, but the lesson is not about sharing. We see him as a great provider of all we need. And we see that he is our Savior King, not forced to lead but willing to serve.

A Great Teacher

Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Next year at this time Jesus would be making his way to Jerusalem for his final Passover celebration with his disciples on his way to the cross. He has one more year to teach them and what a teacher he is! Jesus presents his disciples with a real life problem. There are lots of people who are far from home and far from other villages. These people have been listening to Jesus teach them many things from the time Jesus landed on shore until the evening. Jesus knows the solution but he wants his disciples to think through the question, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”

A great teacher equips his students to be problem solvers. He gives them knowledge and helps them apply that knowledge to new questions and problems. The disciples have been with Jesus for about two years. They have heard him preach and teach and seen many miracles. He has explained many parables to them. But in the moment of this test by Jesus, the disciples fail.

Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

Philip looks at the resources they have and the amount it would take to buy food for all the people. He is a practical and logical guy. I like him. I’m like him. Maybe you are too. Like Philip we find ourselves tested with some unexpected problem in life. We consider the resources we have to solve the problem. Do I have enough money to fix this? Can my friend help me out? Does the doctor have a solution? If our resources will not solve whatever problem we are facing, we resign ourselves to the fact that this problem will not go away. We fail the test like Philip because Philip forget that he was with Jesus. We forget that Jesus is with us and for us too. He may have a solution in mind that we have not considered and cannot see.

Then we come to Andrew the ambitious. *Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”*

Andrew not only thinks about the question, he does something to attempt to solve it. He finds a boy with some food. Five loaves of barley bread and two fish. It might be enough for one or two hungry boys or enough for one family. But they would need to find a thousand more lunches like this to feed the more than 5,000 people gathered around Jesus. Andrew makes a good start by finding a little food and bringing it to Jesus. But he fails when he thinks this will not be enough.

Do you ever stop trying to do what God asks of you because you have only a little talent or skill in that area? For example, the Lord commands parents to bring up their children in the way of the Lord. But some parents may use the excuse, “I don’t know the Bible very well so I won’t try to teach my children. I’ll let others do that for me.” Or perhaps a believer doesn’t have much in the way of financial resources and gives a small offering, thinking, “This is not enough to help anyone.” We fail like Andrew when we fail to see that Jesus is with. He can do amazing things through a parent reading a

short Bible story to their child each night. Jesus is with us. He can do amazing things with the smallest of gifts. We fail when we forget who Jesus is. Jesus is a great teacher and reveals himself to the disciples and to the crowd.

A Great Provider

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Oh, to have been there as Jesus feeds all the people with five loaves and two fish! He just kept passing out food to the disciples who kept passing it out to the people until everyone had enough. Jesus did not just give everyone a snack. He did not divide each loaf into a thousand pieces. This was a full meal for everyone. This was a miracle showing that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world.

We don't expect Jesus to multiply food in this miraculous fashion all the time today. The Gospels only record Jesus doing this twice in his earthly ministry. But we can thank him for the abundance of food in the world. Think of the increase in food production in the United States. For example, corn yield per acre was in the 20's and 30's from about the Civil War up to WWII. It was about the same for almost 80 years. Since WWII the yield has increased by about 2 bushels/acre/year to almost 180 bushels/acre.¹ That is a 6 fold increase in the last 80 years. We cannot fail to see the hand of God in food production advances which provide enough food for all the people of this world.

Maybe it is as simple as remembering who provides our daily bread. If you use what is called the common table prayer, think of Jesus' feeding the 5000 when you pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed." Whether we get it from McDonald's, the grocery store or grow it in our garden, Jesus still provides us with daily bread today.

The crowd of people who benefited from Jesus' miracle in John 6, are beginning to see who Jesus is. He is not only a great teacher who had been teaching them most of the day. He was not only a great provider who can multiply food for thousands. He just might be the Prophet who was to be better than Moses. He might just be the Savior promised by God. But they take the wrong action based on this. Instead of trusting Jesus and listening to his teaching, the people planned to grab Jesus and force him to be their king.

Our Savior King

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

¹ <https://www.agry.purdue.edu/ext/corn/news/timeless/YieldTrends.html>

They want a king now. Surely Jesus would be a better king than any of the Herods. Surely Jesus would be a better king than any of the Roman governors or emperors. Jesus has power over disease and can feed thousands with one little lunch. Jesus draws a crowd. If we take him to Jerusalem now, the people will rally to his side and we'll have a new king who will take care of us. So went the plan in the minds of the people. They wanted to force Jesus to be their king, the kind of king they wanted and they wanted him as king right now.

We might fall into this kind of thinking too. We want Jesus to solve a problem right now in the way we want it solved. It is like we are in command of the King of kings and can tell him exactly how we want things to happen and when. Jesus did not allow the people to make him their Bread King then and will not do things exactly how we think they should happen today. Jesus is the true King of kings and Lord of lords. He does what is good and right. He does what is best and according to the will of his Father in heaven.

So while the crowds with full bellies could not force him to be their king, Jesus would willingly go to Jerusalem the next year as their king. He would not rally people to him for rebellion against the Roman empire, but would ride a donkey and receive the praise of believers as the one who came to save. Hosanna! Our King did not feed the crowds in Jerusalem for the Passover that year but would give himself for all as the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

Those who offer alternative explanations for the miracles of Jesus end up with a Jesus who teaches us to share and be nice to others. The Bible gives us a better Jesus, the true Jesus. He is a great teacher, but more than a great teacher. He is a great provider but more than a great provider. He is the King of all who willingly gave himself on the cross to save all people from sin and eternal death. Let us worship this Jesus.

Amen.