

July 29, 2018 Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
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GOSPEL

John 6:1-21

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the sixth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When 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?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰Jesus 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. ¹¹Then 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. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When 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.”

¹⁵When 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.

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Today we are setting out on a five-week journey...or maybe I should say...a sort of progressive dinner...more than a month long. For five weeks we will be hearing about the Bread of Life – about Christ and what it means for him to be our spiritual food. For those who pay enough attention to the lectionary to look ahead or listen for its rhythms and patterns...the “Bread Weeks” of Year B loom large. And well they should.

The mystery of God's presence to us – especially in the Sacrament of Holy Communion – is deep and wide enough to wonder about for our whole lives and still not be done. But for now, five weeks in the sixth chapter of John will have to do.

Today, we will only just set the table, so to speak...for these weeks. Maybe nibble some appetizers...

Today we hear John's telling of the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes to feed thousands...and this amazing event is only just to whet our appetite for the weeks to come. Perhaps one of the greatest, most memorable signs Jesus performs...and it's only the beginning.

But in this event, we begin to see many things about how God chooses to act in this world...we begin to see the signs that will appear over and over again. We hear how the people are drawn to Jesus from everywhere around. And then we begin to hear and see...and even taste and touch...how God comes to be present with us. And how it is nothing like what we can imagine.

When Jesus looks out at the crowds and realizes the disciples' brains are chugging along, catching up slowly, like they do...and they are probably starting to catch up with him and realize that everyone is going to be getting hungry soon... Already being five thousand steps ahead of them, Jesus asks a cheeky question – as he is wont to do: "Where can we buy enough food for all these people?" And the disciples answer... "What do you mean *where*? Even if there was a 'where' here...we don't have that kind of money. That's a half year's salary...and I don't know if you've noticed...but none of us have been getting paid too well, lately. Look...there's *one* child who brought five loaves and two fish...We don't even have enough to feed one *grown up*. We just have a kid's meal!"

And then Jesus goes and does that thing that God has been doing forever...and takes our declaration of final and futile scarcity...and doesn't even break stride...because our ability to understand so rarely matches with the kingdom's imagination.

Today, in fact, we heard the passage from Ephesians where the words of our Sending Blessing are found...when we say "May God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine grant you the gifts of faith and hope..." In Ephesians, the apostle writes, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever." If you ever thought the blessing was a bit

effusive...the Scripture is even more so... “able to accomplish *abundantly far more than all we can ask...*”

And God *is* able...and that *is* what the kingdom does. It turns things inside out and upside down. It comes to fear and doubt’s playground with its arms full of love and hope. And when everyone wrings their hands saying, “not enough...” it saunters in with piles of leftover containers.

It seems so often than humankind is inclined...as a species...to doubt in the capacity of goodness and love to transform the world...and instead we find way to take amazing creative power...and we twist it into destruction. This is how the brilliance of someone like Wernher von Braun could be turned away from envisioning rockets that could fly to the stars...but instead he designed those rockets to be launched by the Nazi Wehrmacht to take thousands of lives in London and Antwerp. (And, it bears saying that the U.S. and Russia weren’t too righteous to use the technology themselves once they captured it.) Given the choice between beautiful aspiration and hideous self-destruction...we choose the latter.

Sometimes humanity does manage to turn those tables and beat swords into ploughshares, of course. I recently saw an antique show where someone found a Lyle cannon, not knowing what it was...which I didn’t either. And I became fascinated about how an ancient weapons technology slowly came to be recognized as a tool that could save lives instead of taking them. A Lyle cannon...is what it sounds like. It’s a cannon (invented by a guy named David Lyle)...but when it is fired, a line that stays connected to its source is shot out to the target, not to hurt it but to help it. It was used for maritime rescue work...shooting out lines to pull in damaged ships or stranded people at sea.

I wish these types of things didn’t stand out so much as exceptions to what feels like a pretty grim rule...but maybe that’s my own sense of futile scarcity talking. I think God looks at the world and the church and each of us...and says, “What’s wrong? Look at this! Look at all of this! Look at all of you!”

The kingdom turns things upside down and inside out like that. God defies our expectations like that. God takes our, “Look how pitifully little we have! We can’t do anything with this!” and says, “That’ll do. Bring it here.” God stands at our shoulder in the morning when we aren’t sure if we are worth much...or can do much...and says, “You are amazing. This is going to be great.”

God takes scarcity and makes it into abundance. God takes death and gives life. God accomplishes abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine...so much so...that the

leftovers are a feast in themselves...a feast that has continued for two thousand years...and isn't over yet.

It continues today...and it will continue this week – in special ways for our youth and leaders who we bless and send to camp today. The feast will continue in the coming weeks as we ponder the Bread of Life, and gather school kits together...and bless them along with backpacks for a new school year. It will continue in the abundant celebration of the Pride Festival...and as Godly Play leaders from around Central Texas gather here at Peace for training ...and as we celebrate Rally Day and a Ministry Fair of the abundant ways we can worship, learn and serve in this community.

The feast continues. May you find the place at the table that has been set for you...and may you witness God accomplishing more in your life and in this world than you can ask or imagine.

Thanks be to God. Amen.