

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

2 Kings 4:42-44

Psalm 145:10-18

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

07/29/2018

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

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 our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### **Care for One Another**

Good Morning! Last week the reading was from The Gospel of Mark, and in it we danced around two major stories. This week, we jump from the Gospel of Mark to the Gospel of John to hear the two stories that we missed last week. Last week I singled out one specific verse, actually it wasn't even a whole verse, just a small section of a verse, but this week the options for where to go are almost endless! Within the 21 verses of today's Gospel reading we have all kinds of

exciting action; we've got people being fed, disbelief, attempts at a government coup, storms at sea, private communion with God on a mountain, and the miracle of walking on water. Let's hope I can keep this sermon to a feasible length of time!

The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is extremely popular and it is the only miracle that shows up in all four gospels. The story of Jesus walking on water also shows up in three of the four gospels. So we're dealing with two stories that are pretty well known. When I was younger I was caught up in the mechanics of the story, how exactly did these miracles happen? Or, since the word miracle isn't used in the Gospel of John, how does Jesus perform these "signs?" The problem with this line of thinking is that none of the theories have been accepted as fact, so at the end of the day we're still left wondering. These theories get so caught up in explaining how exactly these events could have happened that they also pull our attention from the story, that Jesus somehow fed 5,000 people and walked on water.

Now I ask different questions, and they're questions I think we should all think about. I ask things like how are these stories connected to the larger Gospel as a whole? How is this story connected to other scriptures? What are some of the details that one might miss when reading this for the first time? And finally, I ask what is God trying to tell us right here and now through this story?

So, in order to understand the significance of the text we need to look at the whole picture, we need to know the backstory. The message today is rich with allusions to characters from the Hebrew Scriptures. Any witness, reader, or listener to this story in the first century would have immediately made two connections. Dr. Susan Hulen, the Associate Professor of

New Testament at Emory University helps to point these out.<sup>1</sup> The first would have been the prophet Elisha. In 2 Kings chapter 4 Elisha performs a feeding miracle of his own, using a small amount of bread to feed 100 people.

The other person from Israel's history that would have immediately drawn connections was Moses, but just like the feeding story with the prophet Elisha, Jesus takes things just a few steps further. Where Moses parts the water of the Red Sea for the Israelites, Jesus just simply walks on top. Jesus, like Moses, continually goes up the mountain to be in communion with God. The whole event takes place during the Passover, the central piece of the Exodus story.

All of this helped the audience to draw upon common expectations of Jewish prophets. You know one of the most interesting details of the story? When Jesus comes to the disciples, walking on water, the text tells us that they were afraid. Now this Gospel is different, they don't mistake the appearance of Jesus for that of a ghost like they do in the other Gospels. No, they are afraid because this is a theophany. The text translates Jesus' response as "it is I, do not be afraid." But you could also translate it as "I Am," the name of God. The writer of the Gospel of John seems to go to great lengths to help pull the assumption through of Jesus being the fulfillment of all prophets, painting us a picture that seems to show Jesus as THE Ultimate Prophet.

Which makes me remember something I heard a professor tell me years ago. Do you know how to tell if a prophet was doing a good job? If they were being threatened. A good prophet usually told you things you didn't want to hear. Just look at John the Baptist from a few weeks ago. There were all kinds of people who claimed to be a prophet, but it was usually the ones that challenged the status quo that were speaking the truth. And Jesus speaks the truth. In

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3720](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3720)

John chapter 5, the story that precedes our text today, Jesus talks at length about his commitment to put the needs of others first, that what he speaks comes not from him alone, but from God.

You see, the most important characteristic of a prophet is someone who proclaims the word of God, something Jesus does completely. And what do we see there? What does Jesus proclaim?

That God is a God of community. That when we cut each other off we only hurt ourselves. Our greatest strength is our ability to come together. God the Trinity exists in three distinct persons, and likewise calls on us to come together. Because when we do... amazing things happen. Thousands can be fed, fellowship can be had, and God's love can shine through. When we come together we echo the words of the writer of Ephesians:

*"14For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."* Amen indeed.