

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

74th Week of Pandemic - Indoor Service

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

Psalms 78:23-29

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

08/01/2021

### Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

24When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were [beside the sea,] they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 26Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” 28Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” 29Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” 30So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 32Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives

life to the world.”<sup>34</sup> They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

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

Amen.

### **Bread of Life**

Good morning! It’s weird how you can read a passage over and over and still find something different each time. Today’s Gospel lesson is one we’ve all heard countless times, and yet it hit differently this week. Let’s say, optimistically, that I was at worship each time this lesson came up in the lectionary, that would mean that this is the 11th time that this has been the assigned text. That’s not including the times I have heard it in Bible studies. And maybe, because we have heard it so much, we can be tempted to zone out when it comes up again. But when you look a little closer, it’s a frustrating story.

Will Willimon writes that “*Jesus is more difficult to comprehend than he ought to be.*”<sup>1</sup> And I would have to agree. Norm Otto pointed out that this exchange is very similar to the woman at the well. In both stories Jesus means one thing, while the woman and the crowds mean something else. They might be using the same words, but they’re understanding them in very different ways. So, as I looked closer, it was easy to side with the crowds.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year B, Volume 3.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 309.

Our story today picks up where we left off last week. Jesus feeds the crowds, turning a few loaves of bread and a few fish into a feast, and then he disappears before the crowd can make him king. He literally walks across the sea and sets up camp on the other side. The crowds come searching for him, and our text picks up there. History has not been very nice to the crowd. Our namesake Martin Luther called them “*uncouth and coarse people who were interested solely in eating and drinking.*”<sup>2</sup> Which is saying something from a guy who was reportedly uncouth, and also loved to and drink. While that might be a little too harsh, they do completely miss the point that Jesus is trying to make.

It was quite the journey for me as I prepared for this Sunday. You can't help but feel for the crowds. Like I said, it's not as if Jesus is the easiest person to understand. And it seems as if the crowd is hungry again. They have come to Jesus with one thing on their minds, more food. So when Jesus starts talking about the bread of life, they jump at the chance for something more. But Jesus tells them not to worry about that type of bread, but to work for the bread that will last. “Well Jesus, that's not easy when you're starving.” If you spend most of your time focusing on getting enough food to survive, you probably don't have much time to worry about fancy highfalutin ideas.

So, at a quick glance, it sure seems like the classic problem the church has encountered time and time again. It's hard to share the Good News when people can't hear it over the growling of their own stomachs. But when you look closer... something very different is actually going on. The crowds are NOT hungry. One scholar writes that “*the keynote may be detected in 6:12, where the word 'satisfied' in the account of the feeding of*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 312.

*the five thousand by Jesus suggests not only a filling, but also a fulfilling of their hunger.*<sup>3</sup> After the miracle of the loaves, baskets and baskets were left over. They aren't hungry anymore, they're being greedy.

It seems that God is used to dealing with a bunch of humans who like to complain. In our first reading from Exodus, the Israelites, seeing greener grass on the other side, complain about how things were supposedly better in Egypt. And the part that I especially love, God "hears their complaining." God knows they're being childish, and yet gives in anyway. It's as if God isn't concerned with whether they're right or not, but whether they can move beyond their past.

The crowd in our Gospel also makes a connection with the Exodus story. They point out that they need a sign that Jesus is the bread of life that he claims to be, that Moses gave their ancestors the manna in the wilderness. What's so fascinating is that they have ALREADY been given a sign! The food they just ate! Another scholar writes that "*miracles, in the Fourth Gospel, do not easily bring faith to those who witness them, but more often confusion, division, and hostility.*"<sup>4</sup> It seems that some things never change.

But the comparison with the Exodus story doesn't work. Jesus points out that it wasn't Moses who gave them the food, but God who provided the bread. Likewise, they don't need a sign because Jesus IS the sign. Jesus IS the bread of life. The tense changes from past to present and future.

Will Willimon points out that it can be tempting for preachers to try and tie everything up in a neat and pretty bow. To explain all the hidden meanings, to uncover all the mysteries, and send you all on your way with

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 309.

the answers. But it just isn't possible with this story. He writes that "*the truth being communicated here is so peculiar that mere surface comprehension, mere intellectual assent, is inadequate to the truth under consideration.*"<sup>5</sup> And I have to agree. The crowd doesn't get it, and even the church, which has had the benefit of knowing how the story ends for 2,000 years, still doesn't get it either.

But like I've said before, I think that's part of God's point. When I have all the answers, I don't need to speak with anyone. I've got everything I need and I can hide inside my house and rest content in the knowledge that I get it. But when something is hard to get, when it challenges us, we're forced to come out and seek help from one another. We ask questions, we share our lives together, and we grow as a community. One more quote from Willimon; "*encounter and comprehension of the Word made flesh takes time, humility, about what we can and cannot know, and a worshipful willingness to be taught by a savior who does not come naturally.*"<sup>6</sup> So... let us keep gathering as one to try and piece together just what that might be. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 313.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 313.