

Sermon for Eighth Sunday of Pentecost, July 26, 2009
2 Samuel 11:1-15, Psalm 14, Ephesians 3:14-21, John 6:1-21
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From Capernaum to the other side of the Sea of Galilee or, as it is also called, the Sea of Tiberias, is about four miles by sea. Those who had been watching Jesus knew where he was headed for and they followed on foot around the northern end of the Lake. The Jordan River flows into the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. About two miles up the river are the fords of Jordan and near the fords is the village of Bethsaida Julias where, according to the gospel of Luke, Jesus was headed. Near the village was a plain, an area of flat good grassland.

When Jesus arrived he opted to go up the mountain, or the hillside and sat there with his disciples. He did not get his planned retreat with his disciples as those who followed him by land soon found him. Those who came by land had a nine-mile hike around the lake and across the ford. These bits and pieces of information about the travels of Jesus give us a sense of direction and how far people went to find him, *to touch the hem of his garment*.

John's Gospel also tells us that it was the time of Passover which meant that the roads would also be filled with people, camels etc on their way home for the feast of the Passover or en route to Jerusalem. Many people going to Jerusalem would take this road northern road and go through Perea, re-cross the Jordan near Jericho in order to avoid having to travel through the land of Samaria because they hated the Samaritans.

As the crowd gathers around Jesus and his disciples and gathers numerically, Jesus has compassion on them. They have been listening to him for a long time; they have walked a good distance and they are hungry and thirsty. Jesus is sensitive to this; he has compassion on the multitude. So, the question is, what is he going to do if he plans to feed them. After all there are approximately five thousand men not counting women and children to make a total of about twenty thousand folk altogether.

John records that Jesus turned to Phillip. There is a good reason for this. Philip is from Bethsaida. He knows the locality. Perhaps he can get some food inexpensively or perhaps he knows someone who will donate the food.

Phillip was not excited at the prospect. He replied that it would take at least six months wages to give each of them just a little food.

Andrew spotted a young boy with what we might consider a lunch. He had barley bread, the cheapest of all bread and considered the food of the poorest people. The boy also had two fish. Before we begin to think it was trout, salmon or catfish we need to remember that fish would not keep long in the heat. The Jordan River was filled with small sardine-like fish that were caught and pickled. So, what the boy had was a couple of pickled fish to help him swallow the barley bread.

John records that when the people were fed, *they were satisfied*. It was not just that they had something to eat. They had more than sufficient to eat. They were full. Not only that, Jesus tells his disciples to collect the fragments. This is not about Jesus being Eco- friendly. This is a sign about the abundance that God offers to us. It is also a reference to the Jewish tradition of leaving fragments for those who serve. The fragments filled twelve baskets. A Basket was bottle shaped and Jews never traveled without it. On a journey a Jew would not take the chance of being offered non-kosher food so he needed to carry his own kosher food.

What happened in Bethsaida? Did Jesus work a miracle? We don't really know. What we do know is that something happened, something extraordinary. It may very well have been a miracle. On the other hand, it is possible that since most people did not travel without something to eat, many of them already had food with them. Perhaps not everyone had food, or had enough food. It may have been a case where Jesus, in talking to them about the meaning of the Kingdom of God, convinced them to sit down and share what they had and as a result they discovered that by so doing they had more than enough food

The connection between this story and what happened next may be the reference to Passover. At Passover, Moses had the people eat in a hurry, be ready to leave at a moment's notice. Moses took the people out into the wilderness and they were fed with Manna, and they had more than enough to the point they were told not to hoard it till

the next day. Here are people listening to Jesus, they have just been fed and have had their fill and as they sit in their groups they begin to contrast Jesus with Moses.

In Deuteronomy we read Moses told the people *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brethren him you shall heed.* As they discuss what happened among themselves Jesus is hearing what they are saying and he sends the apostles to the shoreline to get in the boat while he takes off into the hills. He does not wish to be an earthly king. They were misunderstanding his actions.

In his gospel John calls the action of Jesus “signs” where the other writers refer to them as “miracles.” Signs point to something beyond, something greater. There are those in the Christian community who would say that the signs point to Jesus. But Jesus did the signs to point to God. For those watching Jesus and looking for a Messiah, a new King to begin a new kingdom of Israel free of Roman oppression, these signs were important. God was with him. He was charismatic. Jesus would make a good king. Jesus realized they would attempt to make him king so he sent the apostles to the shore and he took off into the hillside.

John says that the apostles took off and when it was dark a storm blew up. On this lake a storm frequently blows up without a warning. How many of us take off on a journey and are not clear as to where we are going. At times it is not always clear where God is calling us. At times it may be confusing and difficult. There are times on our spiritual journey when we find ourselves in what John of the Cross called, “the dark night of the soul.”

Someone once said, “When you find yourself in a small boat in a ravaged storm, pray to God but row to the shore.” What is fascinating is that it is not in finding the shore we find God, but in the rowing to the shore. We find God on the journey and more often than not when it is the darkest.

Often we forget we have every thing we need to do what we are called to do. We get stuck. We become comfortable and it is not until we are forced to make changes that we realize how indifferent we have become toward God. We may not like to hear that said but the reality is that many of us take God for granted. The God we take for

granted is the God that answers our prayers; the God who fixed things for us; the God who works miracles.

God is more and God wants more than a magic show. God wants a relationship. God wants us to know, to feel, to experience God's presence within us and then make that a reality in the world around us through feeding one another materially and spiritually. God wants us to be alive even in the midst of a storm.

God is. God is a verb. God is active and God is action. This active God within us and in the world around us wants us to be so active that we will always fill and be filled with the leftovers of God's generosity working within us.

No matter how generous we are, no matter how kind, or how compassionate we will experience the storms of life. We will experience doubts, disappointments, failure, pain, grief. This is our human story that is part and parcel of our spiritual journey. We are spiritual people on a human journey and, for whatever reason; we bury our spirituality beneath our needs to fix, to control, to be in charge of our lives.

We come to life believing we have our basket full. What we forget is that other people have a full basket, which will compliment our basket, and so we need to share so that we can be filled. There are those who do not share and what they eat will never satisfy them. It is in sharing with one another that we find the balanced meal of spiritual gifts given to us by God.

It is in sharing we participate in the kingdom of God. It is in sharing we make God a real presence in the world. It is in sharing we grow the Kingdom. It is in sharing we discover our limitations and our need for one another to make God a real presence in the world.

It is in sharing our basket we return to the closing prayer of Morning Prayer; Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more that we can ask or imagine. Glory God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.