

## Sunday Lesson – July 25, 2021



**GOSPEL: John 6: 1-21**

### ***Bread and Fish for All***

#### **John's Purpose of Writing**

“Unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, John's purpose is not to present a chronological narrative of the life of Christ but to display His deity. John sought to strengthen the faith of second-generation believers and bring about faith in others, but he also sought to correct a false teaching that was spreading in the first century. John emphasized Jesus Christ as “the Son of God,” fully God and fully man, contrary to a false doctrine that taught the “Christ-spirit” came upon the human Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the crucifixion.” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/Gospel-of-John.html)*

#### **Insight**

“Aside from the resurrection, the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Obviously, the Gospel writers considered this a significant miracle. To feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish is indeed miraculous, but the Greek term used in Matthew 14:21 specifies males, and Matthew further emphasizes the point by adding, “Besides women and children.” Many Bible scholars believe the actual number fed that day could have been 15,000—20,000 people.

God will shatter the pint-sized expectations of what His followers can do if they would learn to bring Him what they have already been given. “Little is much when God is in it.” When Christians are willing to offer their lives sacrificially, relinquishing their hold on whatever God has given them in terms of time, money, talents, etc., God will use these ordinary things to create extraordinary things. Christians must never believe their resources are too little to serve God. God delights in taking a humble, seemingly insignificant person and using him or her for

His glory (see 1 Corinthians 1:27).” *(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/feeding-the-5000.html)*

#### **Gospel Reading**

“After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee (some call it Tiberias). A huge crowd followed him, attracted by the miracles they had seen him do among the sick. When he got to the other side, he climbed a hill and sat down, surrounded by his disciples. It was nearly time for the Feast of Passover, kept annually by the Jews. When Jesus looked out and saw that a large crowd had arrived, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy bread to feed these people?” He said this to stretch Philip's faith. He already knew what he was going to do. Philip answered, “Two hundred silver pieces wouldn't be enough to buy bread for each person to get a piece.” One of the disciples—it was Andrew, brother to Simon Peter—said, “There's a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But that's a drop in the bucket for a crowd like this.” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” There was a nice carpet of green grass in this place. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread and, having given thanks, gave it to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish. All ate as much as they wanted. When the people had eaten their fill, he said to his disciples, “Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted.” They went to work and filled twelve large baskets with leftovers from the five barley loaves. The people realized that God was at work among them in what Jesus had just done. They said, “This is the Prophet for sure, God's Prophet right here in Galilee!” Jesus saw that in their enthusiasm, they were about to grab him and make him king, so he slipped off and went back up the mountain to be by himself. In the evening his disciples went down to the sea, got in the boat, and headed back across the water to Capernaum. It had grown quite dark and Jesus had not yet returned. A huge wind blew up, churning the sea. They were maybe three or four miles out when they

saw Jesus walking on the sea, quite near the boat. They were scared senseless, but he reassured them, “It’s me. It’s all right. Don’t be afraid.” So they took him on board. In no time they reached land—the exact spot they were headed to.” *The Message*

### **What It Could Mean?**

“In the Synoptics, Jesus takes bread; in John, Jesus takes barley loaves. This uniquely Johannine detail adds realism as well as a social location to this meal. Barley, according to Raymond E. Brown, was the bread commonly available to the poor. It may also recall the story of Ruth, who returns with Naomi during the barley harvest. In rabbinic interpretations, Boaz’s gift to Ruth anticipates the messianic banquet for the poor. Jesus’ public approval skyrockets with people wondering whether he is “the prophet who is to come into the world” while still others see an opportunity to conscript Jesus for some earthly campaign. According to the NRSV, Jesus “withdraws” from their coercion tactics; a more difficult and literal translation would be the one proposed by Brown: “so he fled back to the mountain alone.” The disciples, left to their own lights, take the initiative and push out to sea.

Darkness makes one of eight appearances in this Gospel: “It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them”—the crowd is gone and crucially, so is Jesus. As our gaze turns to the disciples in the boat, we see a vivid picture of John’s pastoral approach to the human condition. Unlike the Synoptics where the story is told from Jesus’ perspective, the narrator puts the reader in the boat with the disciples, as those who look for Jesus in the growing chaos and darkness of a stormy sea.

Sometimes it feels as if we want Jesus on our terms, and when that’s the case, we don’t want Jesus, but rather our fill. Instead of getting our fill, John would have us see Jesus, the One who is the messianic banquet for the poor. What does that mean? Maybe we struggle to fix our eyes on Jesus because we love darkness rather than the light that comes into the world. John

places the community that has chosen to follow Jesus in the boat with the disciples, on a rough sea under cover of night, wanting but not having Jesus in their possession.

We want to take Jesus into our boat, enlisting Jesus in our causes. Or have we in the turmoil of the last year or so begun to recognize the nearness of Jesus, which is not the same as physical possession? Photographer Sally Mann quotes one of her father’s diary entries in her memoir, *Hold Still*: “Do you know how a boatman faces one direction, while rowing in another?” In an Alcoholics Anonymous group, Rudy says that he has learned to see the past as a reference point but not as a residence. Yet, as we pull at the oars, our physical gaze only takes in where we’ve been. How will we ever get to our destination? “The brutal truth,” according to James K. A. Smith, is this: “You can’t get there from here. Not even a map is enough. You might already have realized where you need to go, but the question is how to get there. What if God sent a boat? What if the Creator captained a ferry from that other shore?” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Robert Hoch*)

### **Readings for Further Study**

- [Matthew 14: 13-21/Mark 6: 31-44, Luke 9: 12-17](#) *Other Gospel versions of Christ feeding the 5,000*
- [Matthew 14: 22-36 & Mark 6: 45-56](#) *Other versions Christ walking on the sea*

### **Thought for the Day**

“Every happening great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message.” ~ *Malcom Muggeridge*

### **A Prayer**

Father God, Thank you for hearing my prayers. Teach me to pray with a posture of expectation that Your will be done in my life and in the situations and lives that I pray for. Help me to wait and to trust Your perfect answer and Your perfect timing! In Jesus Name. **Amen.**