

Sermon and Prayers

9th Sunday after Pentecost, July 25, 2021

Bishop Bill Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, you have placed within the hearts of all your children a longing for your word and a hunger for your truth. Grant that we may know your Son to be the true bread of heaven and share this bread with all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I 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, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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. Amen.

John 6:1-21

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When 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?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus 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.

Then 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When 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.”

When 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.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a

strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, from God our Creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

And from your siblings in Christ who are spread across the mission territory of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, greetings and woo-hoo in the name of Jesus.

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The boy stands alone, lunch bag in hand, listening in on the conversation that adults are having about him.

One of the men – the one that everyone has come to see and hear, Jesus – had looked out over the hundreds of humans assembled, saw their hunger, and wondered aloud about how to feed them.

One of the others had snickered a bit and said that it would take a ridiculous amount of money that they did not have...and, besides, what caterer could provide food for 5000 on such short notice?

That's when one of the others had looked at the boy, saw the lunch bag in his hand, and inquired as to the contents. After the child nervously told him, the man turned toward Jesus, pointed at the boy, and said, "This kid's got five loaves of barley bread and a couple of dried fish. But, of course, that's nowhere near enough."

Now the boy stands in the ensuing silence, holding his lunch bag a little tighter, wishing he had just stayed back buried in the crowd, rather than trying to get so close to Jesus.

The man is right, after all. It's not enough. It's never been enough. He, the boy, has never been enough, always falls short of others' and his own expectations, never had anything to contribute...

He'd never even been invited.

Even the food he has isn't the right stuff. Everybody knows, including the boy, that the barley bread and dried fish he clings to are the food of poor people.

So, no one else would want it anyway. Surely, they'd turn up their noses at it like so many did when they passed him on the street.

Standing still while Jesus turns his gaze on him, the child knows that the man who had pointed him out is right about the boy: What was he among so many people and so much need?

Without shifting his gaze from the boy, Jesus finally says to his companions, "Make the people sit down."

While those companions of Jesus work their way through the crowds and the people begin to sit in rolling waves of wondering, Jesus draws the boy closer and gently asks for the barley bread and fish.

It's all the child has. And if he gives it to Jesus, the boy himself will likely not have his own hunger satisfied.

He holds the bag tighter, trembling.

And then, because he has seen Jesus reach out to people like him with compassion and love, because he has come to trust this Jesus in ways he cannot understand, the boy eventually loosens his grip on what he has. The child lets go, for just a moment, of the belief that it's not enough – that he is not enough – and meekly offers his meager, unappealing stuff and self to Jesus and then sits down with all the other hungry people.

The child watches in wonder as Jesus takes his barley bread and dried fish and gives thanks for it. The boy can't remember the last time someone gave thanks for him, or for something that he had done or given. No wonder it had been so hard to let go of what he had.

But now he dares to believe that it's in good hands, that he is in good and generous hands, whatever happens.

Jesus himself now moves out among the hungry people and offers barley bread and dried fish to every one of them. They take and eat...every one of them.

No amount of straining and staring on the part of the boy – even when Jesus offers the food to him – reveals how it happens. All the child knows and will later tell others is that everyone ate until they were filled, including him – and there were even leftovers!

Walking home with a full stomach and heart, the boy realizes that drawing close to Jesus, even at Jesus' invitation, is scary...especially when you realize that he asks everything of you and invites you to die to keeping your stuff for yourself.

But then, when Jesus gives thanks for what we or others think is our meager, worthless, no account offering and then accomplishes with it far beyond what we could ever dare ask, imagine, or understand to feed and bless, satisfy and free others – and you along with them – well, drawing close to Jesus is pure joy and works the wonder of life that really is life.

For this reason, dear child of God, with the apostle Paul, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Holy Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and the world and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Rooted in Christ and sustained by the Spirit, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church. Bless the ministries of our neighboring congregations and ministries. Empower churches throughout the world and encourage missionaries who accompany global neighbors. Kindle in us a spirit of collaboration, that all people may know your loving works. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for creation. Send rain to lands experiencing drought and come to the aid of those enduring sweltering heat. Nurture wheat and barley crops grown for the nourishment of your people and conserve aquatic habitats and fish populations. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for those who govern. Cast out arrogance, selfishness, and corruption and instruct those who lead to practice compassion and humility. Inspire them with a vision of the common good and a commitment to ensure that all who hunger are fed. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for those bowed down by heavy burdens: those who are unemployed or underemployed, those unable to find affordable housing, and those without health insurance. Console those who grieve and hear the cries of those who call to you for healing (*in particular, those we name silently and aloud*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for our local faith community. Deepen our resolve to use what we have to serve those in need. When we worry that we do not have enough resources for ministry, assure us of your abundance. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for those who have died. As you sustained them through all their days, so dwell in our hearts, that we may have the power to comprehend with all the saints the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We lift these and all our prayers to you, O God, confident in the promise of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

[Prayers adapted from SundaysandSeasons.com]