

## PENTECOST X, 2018

### John 6.1-15

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I hope you like bread. Because, you are going to hear a lot about it in the weeks to come. Beginning this week and the next four weeks the Gospel readings are all from the Sixth Chapter of the Gospel of John, on the theme of Jesus the bread of life.

Our reading this day is the sign Jesus does that introduces the themes of the rest of this chapter. Jesus feeds 5,000 people who have come to listen to His teaching and be healed of their diseases. This is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels of the New Testament, though each Gospel treats the story in its own unique way. Something happened that day really stuck in the memory of the disciples and the early Church that this story appears in all four Gospels.

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Let's look at some of the keys to understanding this story and its message to us. The first is, Jesus performs this miracle on a mountaintop. In the world of the Bible, mountains were the places you went to get close to God, because such places were the closest points you could get to where God dwells. God revealed Himself on mountain tops. Think of Moses or Elijah at Mt. Sinai. Think of the Sermon on the Mount. Or the Transfiguration.

A second feature of John's telling of this story is the time that it occurs – at the Passover. Now, what was Passover all about? It was the great patriotic and religious holiday of the Jewish people. Passover remembered God's act of salvation, when He freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. It was the 4th of July, Christmas, and Easter all rolled into one. And, of course, Passover involves a meal, just like in this story. As a Jewish saying goes, "They tried to kill us. They failed. Let's eat."

The timing of this feeding of the 5,000 at the time of Passover is clear: Just as in the first Passover God acted to save His people from slavery to the Egyptians, now God is acting again in Jesus to feed and save His people. It is no wonder that after this event the people want to make Jesus king. They think Jesus is Elijah, the prophet whose return was promised at the end of time, when God would eliminate Israel's enemies and give His people ever-

lasting peace. They take the miracle of the feeding as a sign that God is now going to overthrow their enemies and establish His Kingdom.

But Jesus refuses the attempt to make Him king. His purposes are not political rule or military conquest. He withdraws, but the next day the crowd finds Him. This becomes the setting for His sermon on the theme, "I am the bread of life," which interprets the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

What shall we learn from this text today for us, God's people, in our time and place?

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On one level, there is the simple message of God's compassion for people. God responds to people at their most basic level of need: food. People need to be fed. God responds with food.

So, it has always been that a basic charity of the Church is a ministry of food for those in need. The mission of the Church is to continue what Jesus began: announce God's rule of love and show that love by a ministry of healing in the world. One way the Church brings a sign of God's Kingdom to the world is by ministry to the hungry. Feeding others is a reflection of God's compassion for people. To feed someone is to love them. We learn that at birth, when the first thing a mother does for her newborn baby is to nurse the child. To feed someone is to love them.

This ministry is all the more important in our time, because our world has an eating disorder called world hunger. Some people – like us – are like the man in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, dining daily on rich foods. At the same time, the Lazarus' of the world lack daily necessities. Daily 31,000 of these Lazarus' known as children die of hunger. Yet there is sufficient food produced in the world to supply everyone with a 2,500-calorie diet every day. You and I spend about 10% of our income on food; in poorer countries people spend half their income on food.

Most of this inequity is not our fault. There are many reasons for this: cultural, geographic, political, economic. But we are *complicit* in the global eating disorder known as world hunger. You and I benefit from the injustices of the world's eating dis-

order. This also compromises our witness as the Church: it is difficult to say that we represent the healing power of God, the love of God, when we are sitting atop the pyramid of the world's food chain, filling our faces with junk food.

I am not saying this to lay a guilt trip on anyone. But, we can become more aware of the plight of the world's hungry, become aware of our own lifestyles and misuse of food, and like Jesus raise up a sign of God's love by our care for the hungry. We do not have the illusion that we will cure the problem of hunger. Neither did Jesus cure every person in his day. But we can raise up a sign that God's Kingdom is among us, by doing deeds of mercy for those who lack basic food for life.

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A second lesson of this story for us today is: God will provide what we need to do the ministry God wants done in this place. In the story, it seems as though there is not enough food to feed all the people. People start to get anxious about their situation. But God in his great mercy takes what is given and uses it to provide for all. Where some people saw problems, Jesus sees possibilities.

This text speaks right to our situation today. I have heard reports and rumors of some of our members getting anxious about the situation of Advent Church. Such as: When will the Call Committee have a new pastor for us? When will we get back in the nave?

Anxiety is normal in situations like this. The key question is: how do you handle it? How do you manage your own anxious reactions? Do you concentrate on your goals, or give in to your fears? Are we willing to simply trust that God will provide what we need to do the ministry of the Gospel here in this place?

We can. And we will in due time get back in the nave. The Call Committee is doing due diligence in recommending a person to be the next pastor of this church. God will provide, just as he did for all those people Jesus fed that day on a mountain in Galilee.

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A third perspective: Can you see the connection between this story today and what happens here every Sunday? Listen again to the text:

*Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated....*

Now listen to the words from our liturgy of Holy Communion, which you hear each week:

*In the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, gave thanks, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'This is my body, given for you.'..."*

2,000 years ago on a hillside in Galilee, 5,000 people received God's salvation in the form of bread taken, blessed, and given. God showed his mercy and love by feeding the people, but in the readings of the next four weeks we shall see that God wants to fill more than our stomachs. He wants to feed our souls. God wants to give us, not just the bread of temporal life, but the true bread of eternal life, Jesus.

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This is why today you may receive the salvation of God, the forgiveness of sins, the assurance that God loves you no matter who you are or what you have done, and the promise of eternal life. It comes in the form of bread taken, blessed and given: "This is the Body of Christ, given for you." Amen.