



Northeastern  
Ohio Synod

## Summer Sabbath Sermon Series - 2024

*Proper 17 - 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - July 28, 2024*

### Texts for the Sunday (sermon refers to John and 2 Kings):

2 Kings 4:42-44

Psalms 145:10-18

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

*Written by Deacon Jenny Frantz. Copyright 2024.*

### **John 6:1-21**

<sup>1</sup>Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup>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?" <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup>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."

<sup>15</sup>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.

<sup>16</sup>When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup>got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup>The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup>Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.*

Deacon Frantz is a "museum person." She could spend hours wandering, reading, and learning about almost any topic - history, art, science, animals, architecture, woodworking, watermelons - you name it. Part of what is so fun for her about museums is learning about the passions of other people. Someone thought this topic was important enough to have an entire museum dedicated to it.

But maybe more importantly, Deacon Frantz loves museums because she loves to learn. It was instilled in her from a very young age. She learns through exploring the world, reading, experimenting - in some ways, it's about trying to figure things out. Learning to understand and comprehend the world, including people.

Deacon Frantz thinks this is why, when she read today's Gospel, she immediately finds herself launching into the "how's." She wants to "figure out" the miracle of the feeding of the large crowd - And she thinks she has a pretty good hypothesis as well, but we're getting ahead of the story.

You may have noticed that today's Gospel, even though it is told as one narrative, actually contains two stories.

First, let's start with the feeding of the large crowd. It is interesting to note that this is the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four of the Gospels. All four accounts share most of the same story, you may be familiar with the basics:

- Jesus goes to a certain place and is met there by a great multitude, numbering (at least) five thousand
- the need to feed the crowd emerges
- only five loaves and two fish are available
- a command is given for the people to sit
- Jesus takes the bread and offers a blessing/gives thanks
- the food is distributed
- all the people eat until their hunger is satisfied
- twelve baskets of leftovers are collected

As we enter the story in the Gospel of John, a great crowd is following Jesus. They are expecting something amazing to happen. They've already seen Jesus perform signs (John's preferred word for miracles) and wonders.

They have gone up a mountain, which we know to be a more remote location. A place that has less access to food. To feed everyone, this truly was going to take a miracle.

It is important that in this Gospel, it is Jesus who notices the hunger of the people. Jesus has compassion for the crowd. He is close enough to them to see their hunger. Jesus brings this to the attention of the disciples and asks Phillip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" but Jesus already knows what he is going to do.

As Andrew tells him of the boy who has five loaves and two fish, Jesus tells the disciples to have the crowd sit down. Imagine yourself for a moment as a member of this crowd. You are eagerly expecting something to happen, and now you've been told to sit down. To wait. And to watch.

Jesus takes the loaves and fish, gives thanks, and then (specific to the book of John) Jesus distributes the food himself. This simple meal multiplies. Enough to feed everyone until they were satisfied. With baskets leftover.

Now here is where my brain likes to try to explain this miracle (I warned you):  
Was there truly an endless supply of food just from those two fish and five loaves?  
Or...

Did the child's gift inspire others? Did other people in the crowd realize they also had a small amount they could share with others?

I cannot help but think for a moment about how we typically respond when resources are scarce. We tend to hoard, save, and do everything in our power not to lose those resources. Our churches are no different. It seems that the less money and people we have, the less we want to share. We move to preservation rather than generosity.

Is it possible that the faith of the child, moved to share what they had, inspired a crowd towards generosity? Did this first gift inspire others to give as well?

No matter the "how" of this story, we also have to ask the "why."

I mentioned that this miracle is included in all four Gospels. Well, the earliest readers of the Gospels would have been familiar with the stories we find in the Old Testament. They would recall the story of God providing manna in the wilderness through Moses and they would also know the first lesson we read today: the story of Elisha feeding a hundred persons with twenty loaves (2 Kings 4.42-44). By connecting him to Moses and Elisha, this story marks Jesus as a person of great importance to the people. In fact, the crowd in the story even identifies him as a "prophet" (verse 14). They would soon turn to acknowledge Jesus as King!

Yes, the people come for a miracle, and that is exactly what they receive. But is it the miracle they expected? Jesus sees the needs of the people and works to satisfy those needs. Jesus shows the people his compassion.

But why the second story in this narrative?

As evening comes, the disciples get in a boat to cross the sea. As it turns dark, the sea becomes rough and a strong wind kicks up. The disciples do their best to keep going, but as they press on - terrified - Jesus walks across the water to be with them.

When they see him, Jesus says to them "It is I. Do not be afraid."

Now this phrase is more than Jesus identifying himself to the disciples. No, in Greek, this phrase literally translates to "I AM." To those who would have been listening in the early centuries, this would have been a recognizable acknowledgment of the divine presence. "I AM" is the name of God given to Moses. Jesus continues with the language of "theophany." It is the language repeated throughout the scriptures to people who are in the presence of God.

In this moment, Jesus is once again revealing who he is. He doesn't calm the storm around the disciples, rather, they take him into the boat and continue to shore. Much like the crowd, I am sure this is not what the disciples expected. Yet, Jesus sees the need of the disciples - his presence - and satisfies that need.

People of God, are we like the crowd? Expecting to see big things? Asking for miracles (and sometimes we even receive them)? Are we like the disciples? Fearful of the storms that swirl around us?

Most likely we are both. And may we be like the crowd, the disciples, (and Deacon Frantz in a museum), moved to awe and wonder - and excited to see what comes next.

What God does may not be at all what we expect. God sees what our needs really are... and they may not be needs we even recognize. Maybe our need is simply the reassurance that God is always present with us. We do not need to be afraid. Amen.