

9th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 12—Year B

John 6:1-21

July 25, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is a universal experience. From the moment we are born we are faced with it. It is a part of what all of us confront. We all know it. It never goes away for good, but always returns. It propels us to the things that give us life, or at least to the things that we think will give us life, to the things that quite literally we can't live without. We spend time, effort, and energy of every kind on making it go away, on filling ourselves with something, on staving it off and keeping it at bay. Do you know what I am talking about? HUNGER.

God cares about our hunger, whatever it is we are longing for, hunting for, hoping for. We hear this message, loudly and clearly, in today's gospel lesson. The early church apparently knew it because the story we hear today of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle story of Jesus that gets told in all four gospels. There is no other story like that. Every single one of them—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—recount this story and two of them even tell it twice. For early Christians, this story clearly got to the heart of something they knew was important about Jesus, about who he was and what he was up to, and what he found to be important.

So what does this story have to say to us this morning? In John's version, Jesus has been in Galilee healing the sick. The people have noticed the signs he's been up to, so a crowd follows him to the place where he's gone with his disciples. There are so many of them. Jesus looks at Philip and says, *"Where are we to buy bread for all these people to eat?"* Jesus sees their need and, while he knows what he is going to do, he asks the disciples what they think they should do. Here in John's telling of the story, it is JESUS who asks the disciples; in Matthew, Mark, and Luke the DISCIPLES ask him.

Philip begins to work on logistics, as he mentally calculates how much money they need to buy supper for all these folks. Philip is thinking practically: "Half a year's paychecks won't cover it. Our budget just isn't big enough. Our resources are just too few." At this point, Andrew chimes in, saying *"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish."* Andrew looks at who's around, at what's available. And what's available is the lunch of a boy who is clearly not a power broker, for John mentions the detail that the bread is made from BARLEY flour, the flour that poor folks, not rich people, used for bread baking.

The way John tells the story, it's clear that Jesus is the One who can end real hunger—of every sort, not just the kind that makes for growling stomachs an hour before

lunchtime. For John changes yet another detail in the story: He makes JESUS the host of this meal, the one who distributes the food. In the other gospels, it's the DISCIPLES who do the work of distribution, and those stories say important things too. But here in John, there's something else going on. Something else I believe we are supposed to hear, see, and know. In this version, it is JESUS himself who hands out the food.

For the gospel writer of John, it is Jesus himself who will become the real food; Jesus who will say to us in just a few verses later, *"I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never hunger."* As in the other gospels, we hear that the crowds eat till they are filled, till their hunger is gone.

A strange food, this food called Jesus. We consume it, take it into ourselves like ordinary bread. We begin to digest it, till it becomes part of us. But then this bread of life does something else, something that ordinary bread doesn't do. This bread, this food, this Jesus begins to consume us, begins to make us part of him. We are used to consuming our food, but now our food consumes us. And in that consumption, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we ourselves become living loaves, food for a world starving for God's grace and mercy.

In just a few minutes, you and I are again invited to feed on this same One who fed the 5,000—the One who is both the host and the meal, the One through whose death and resurrection is able to offer us, in this meal, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet where all God's beloved are seated.

Are you hungry for a closer relationship with your spouse or child? Feast on the One who draws all people to himself. Are you starving for more respect from colleagues and co-workers? Be fed by the One who has called you not servant, but friend. Are you longing for peace and tranquility in this world adjusting to a new "normal", post-pandemic? Accept the invitation to the meal hosted by the One who promises rest to those who are weary and carrying heavy burdens. Are you craving meaning and direction in your days and weeks? Eat the One who is the Way, Truth, and the Life. Receive that which satisfies our deepest hunger—the love, healing, and forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ—and then share it in order that God may feed the world God truly, and deeply, loves. Amen.