

VISIBLE WORDS: BREAD OF LIFE

Pentecost 10-B July 29, 2018

John 6:1-21

Today we hear a lot about God's abundance. It is reflected in our readings this morning and, in many ways, makes itself known throughout our worship. In the gospel reading alone, we have everything we need and more, as we hear about not one, but at least two signs from Jesus: feeding 5,000 and walking on water. One miracle per selected reading would be enough. But John is quick to follow up by recording a second sign, just in case we missed the point that there is something very special about this one called Jesus of Nazareth.

We've moved into the Fourth Gospel this morning, and we will be dwelling on the theme of Jesus, the bread of life, in some fashion or another over five weeks. Today is the introductory portion of John 6, serving up two miracles or signs that God is working in Jesus. The crowd is so impressed by the feeding miracle that "...they were about to come and take him by force to make him king."

Obviously, Jesus wants nothing to do with that plan, in part because it would be presumptuous and dangerous for Jesus to take such a role; plus (as we can observe from this side of the cross) it goes against God's plan for God's people and for Jesus. That Jesus "withdrew" from everyone suggests that he needed to process the day's events and, I believe, to spend some prayerful time reflecting on how to move forward.

Meanwhile, I'm guessing that Jesus' friends are perplexed by his disappearance and wonder exactly how their work will continue. They get in the boat and head on to Capernaum, only to find the journey difficult with the strong wind against them. Enter the second miracle of the day: they encounter Jesus walking across the water; and just as they are trying to get him out of the water and into the boat, they reach land. On so many levels, this seems like an important sign; yet it is almost matter-of-factly reported by the evangelist. Yet again, we see Jesus in control over the natural order of things: multiplying barley loaves and fish into a meal for 5,000, *and* Jesus rejoining his friends by walking on water on the way to Capernaum.

The past two weeks we talked about baptism, so having the powerful sign of water this morning helps us recall the water of baptism as our way of crossing over into a new life and a new calling.

Looking back at the first sign John records in this chapter, the feeding, our minds will ponder another feeding in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The words ring familiar: Jesus "took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them..." In a little while we will surround the Table, where we too will receive from God's storehouse of generosity. A little bread, a little wine—these things multiply into something greater when Jesus is in the picture. The gifts we receive remind us that God gives us more than we deserve, and often, more than we need. Yet the reminder comes from Jesus in today's reading that nothing be wasted: when we receive much, we have the opportunity to give much, so that nothing is wasted. This is not to say that we can't throw the bread crusts out to the birds; rather it reminds us that we live in a world where God provides everything we need, and more! Jesus' command to let nothing be wasted reminds us: out of the abundance we have experienced, we have a responsibility to not let those blessings go to waste.

We live in a part of the world that is teeming with resources, where food is readily available, and where, even the poorest among us have a better standard of living than a majority of the world's

population. The people of our congregation and the Outer Banks community are generous. Many here who know they are blessed give much of their time and resources. Yet here and across our nation, many do not have sufficient food. And on a worldwide basis, while many places have food enough plus “twelve baskets” leftover, there are millions who lack even basic sustenance. As we launch into several weeks of how “the bread of life” has made himself known to us, we will have some time to contemplate how we might share out of the abundance we’ve received. Today we will hear about an opportunity to multiply our gifts to ELCA World Hunger.

This week, and in the weeks to come, we will explore how The Word Made Flesh can be reflected through us as a visible sign of God’s love for all. May God continue to bless us and multiply God’s goodness through us. Amen.