

Lent 04 - John 6:1-15

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John 6:1-15

After this, Jesus crossed over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). ²A large crowd followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he was performing on those who were sick. ³Jesus went up on the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵When Jesus looked up and saw a huge crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, "Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶But Jesus was saying this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.

⁷Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to have just a little."

⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what is that for so many people?"

¹⁰Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, so they sat down. There were about five thousand men.

¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves and, after giving thanks, he distributed pieces to those who were seated. He also did the same with the fish—as much as they wanted.

¹²When the people were full, he told his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over so that nothing is wasted." ¹³So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with pieces from the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴When the people saw the miraculous sign Jesus did, they said, "This really is the Prophet who is coming into the world."

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they intended to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

God Provides, Even in Hunger

Jesus' miraculously fed five thousand men, besides women and children. It's one of two times Jesus miraculously fed a multitude. The other time was later on in His ministry, where Jesus fed "4000 men besides women and children." They are both miraculous, but this is the big one.

This is one of a few narratives included in each of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each event is the same - Jesus feeds over 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish - but each writer includes some specific details in their account to make us focus on certain things. John Especially does. He has a very specific point: being fed spiritually is more important than being fed or taken care of physically. We tend to separate and focus on either/or, but God does both. Let's look at the details John gives:

First, John says Jesus crossed over the sea and is on His way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Passover was the meal God instituted for the Israelites on the night before He led them out of slavery in Egypt. This is the first of three Passovers Jesus celebrated during His ministry.

For us who are on our way spiritually to Jerusalem to join Jesus in His Passion as He fulfills the Passover by giving His own body and blood as our Passover Lamb, this is good for us to remember. But there's also another reason John brings up the Passover - and Jesus' crossing of the sea here.

After the first Passover in Exodus, Moses led the people who had been slaves in Egypt across the sea into the wilderness to freedom. But almost immediately, the people complained. They had just been saved from slavery and already they're complaining! They actually said (paraphrased) "It would have been better if we had died in Egypt! At least there we had enough food, we ate bread to the full!" And they said to Moses, "For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill us with hunger!" The people even came close to stoning Moses.

You can imagine this scenario is on the minds of Jesus' disciples, they're thinking, '*we've come across the sea*, there's no food over here, and there's this huge mob of people, if we don't feed them, they might turn on us, maybe they'll even stone Jesus.' Just like the Israelites. John's account is also the only one to tell us what they thought. John tells us Jesus tests one of His disciples, Philip. Jesus says "*Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?*" Philip answered him, *probably a little dumbfounded at Jesus' question*, "*Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to have just a little.*" One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "*There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what is that for so many people?*"

They're thinking, 'Jesus, look, we know you're obviously concerned for these people to be fed in their soul. That's great. But we've got a more important issue here: physical food. Worry about the spiritual stuff later. Right now, we need food. Send them away to go buy food. If they're really interested in what you have to say, they'll come back later.'

How inconsiderate of Christ, He doesn't seem care about the poor. He even has to be reminded to do good. That's what the disciples words showed their hearts believed.

What about us? Do we ever think like that? 'God, why do you let all these people suffer? Why are there so many homeless people, why so many people without food or water?' 'God, why do you let me suffer like this, do you really care about my physical needs?' or 'God, remember

you're supposed to do good, can't you just do more?' or 'if you won't, I will. We can worry about religion and mincing words later, right now, let's worry about the more important stuff, helping people and taking care of their *real* needs.'

Words like this, like the disciples and the Israelites, don't show concern, they show unbelief. See, God doesn't pit spirituality against physicality. He doesn't pit feeding someone's soul against feeding their bodies. He doesn't pit paying attention to His Word against paying attention to someone's physical needs, as if the two are mutually exclusive. No, God does both. But one of them must come first - and it's not the physical.

After the Israelites complained to Moses about their lack of physical food; God provided. He said to them, "I will rain bread from heaven for you." He gave them Manna to eat that settled like dew on the ground, it was the easiest food of all and never had they tasted anything so good - and He gave them plenty. But God also did so with a test. He told them not to save any until morning. He wanted to make sure they trusted in Him for their daily bread. But they didn't. They saved some up, and it grew worms and molded. "[God] humbled [them], allowed [them] to hunger, and fed [them] with manna [which was a food like no other], that He might make [them] know that man shall not live by bread alone; but...by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt. 8:3).

It's the temptation of Satan to Jesus in the wilderness, and it's the same temptation we have. We want to put physical needs first. But "man does not live by bread alone, but by *every* word" - not some words, not only those we feel are important - but "*every* word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."

Sometimes God may need to take away our physical blessings, and even our food, in order to show us what's important as he did to the 5000 and the Israelites. But God does provide. Even here, to His disciples who are currently unbelieving. God provides daily bread even to all the wicked. God fills the hungry. So Jesus fed over 5000 people with five loaves and two fish, to show how He doesn't forget about our physical needs. He provides our daily bread. And He gives us plenty - more than we even know about or realize most of the time.

But He also wants us to have our priorities straight. Bread only lasts a day or so, and that includes everything we have in this life. But God's Word never fades away.

At the end of our narrative, John gives us one more unique detail. These people, who had followed Jesus because He had done miracles and healed the sick, had seen this wonderful miracle, and ate to their full...but they still wanted more. John says they wanted to make Jesus king, that is an earthly king, by force.

Like the disciples, these people don't get it. This is a prelude to Palm Sunday where the multitudes hail their coming King, thinking Him to be their physical savior from earthly tyrants, and Jesus' trial before Pilate in which Pilate asks Jesus if He is a king of this world. The people wanted to make Jesus king, an earthly king by force. If only these people had known the Lord's Prayer and understood God's promises:

Jesus had given them their daily bread, and more so - and precisely because of it, they wanted to make Jesus Kingdom come, believing it was a physical kingdom. And they wanted their will do be done by force, rather than God's will be done through love. In doing so, they failed to know God's Word; they failed to set their priority on spiritual things rather than physical things, and so they failed to keep His name holy.

After this section, John tells us the next day, Jesus came upon these people again, and He said to them, "I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty. (Jn 6:35)."

This is the most important way that God provides for us. Not physically, but spiritually. He gives us Jesus Himself. He is the Passover Lamb. He gives us His body and blood in the Lord's Supper along with the bread and the wine. And He tells us to come, "often." He gives us plenty; He gives us more than we need.

And He doesn't command us to come. He invites us. We don't partake of the Lord's Supper because we have to. We partake in it, because we need it. Because we're starving in our sin, we hunger for righteousness. Sometimes we realize it more than at other times. And it's often

at times when our physical bread is lacking that we realize our hunger and need for spiritual bread.

Take for instance the shut-in woman who has just enough strength to raise her arm to turn on the radio to remind her of people out there, longs for the communion with the entire Christian Church, whenever she partakes of the Lord's heavenly meal.

The student, who is miles away from his home, from his family, and his church, but longs to receive strength to help him through his deprivation and depression in the Bread of Life's life-giving and life-sustaining body and blood.

The man in active duty in a foreign nation, who witnesses death first hand, who is even asked to kill if necessary and left to bear that burden alone, longs for the life and salvation found with the forgiveness in Christ's body and blood, which is evidence to Him the resurrection of the dead through the real body and blood of Christ on the altar.

The sinner. Who this week is especially tormented by his guilt, wondering where and when God is going to step in, longs for the comfort and forgiveness and strength found in this heavenly manna.

And to each of these hungry people, Christ provides bread, heavenly bread. He gives Himself through His means of grace.

We may realize our need for Christ's means of grace, His heavenly bread, more at some times than others, but we always really need it. And He *a/ways* freely gives it. If Jesus could miraculously feed a multitude, He'll feed you. He'll give you the bread you really need. Through Christ, you will never hunger, nor thirst.

Amen.

Gloria Patri...