Invitation to the Table

In the 5th chapter of John, Jesus feeds 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, and afterwards, twelve baskets of leftovers are taken up. A lot is made of the five loaves and two fish—symbolism, metaphor… Some say most of the people brought a lunch, and the generosity of the boy sparked a miraculous wave of generosity throughout the whole crowd. In my twisted mind, I've been wondering where they got the twelve baskets!

Then, the entire 6th chapter of John develops the theme of "Jesus as the Bread of Life."

But the stage is set with five loaves and two fish. That might not seem like much, but through whatever manifestation of the power of God, it became a meal for over 5000 people.

A loaf and a cup might not seem like much, but through whatever manifestation of the power of God they become the presence of Christ in our midst and in us.

It may we don't have much to offer. We're not too many. But what might God do if we place what we have in God's hands and let God's power flow through it?

As we sing our Communion Hymn, reflect on what you have that God might multiply if you simply let Jesus to Jesus' thing.

Our Communion Hymn is #429, "You Satisfy the Hungry Heart."

Pastoral Prayer

Bethany's Sister & Dad

Amy Hutto's father

Our friend, Bob Danks

God, whose power we cannot fathom, we struggle to understand how you work through the seemingly powerless, we wonder how your power is made perfect in our weakness. You have come to us today through loaf and cup, and we remembered how the suffering servant, Jesus, endured the cross; and yet the cross did not thwart your intention and purpose to sum up your creation in him.

Whatever power was made perfect in the weakness of Jesus, let it flow through us. Empower us to represent you in our world. Take the seeming weakness of our service to each other and to you and let your power flow freely into our world.

God, whose reach exceeds our understanding, even with your unfathomable power, in Christ you kneel to wash your friends' feet, your friendship reaches to those in need. In Christ you have untied our burdens and healed our spirits. We lift our prayers for those still burdened, for those seeking healing, of body, mind, and relationships.

Use us as instruments in your hands, reaching out to heal and unite the brokenness of our world, in the name of Jesus, our Christ, AMEN

True Bread

JOHN 6:24-35 (NRSVUE) *So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.* 25 *When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"* 26 *Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves.* 27 *Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."* 28 *Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"* 29 *Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* 30 *So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?* 31 *Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"* 32 *Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.* 33 *For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* 34 *They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."* 35 *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

The Word of God for the people of God!

When Marcus was at the Table two weeks ago, he shared that quote from Jesus: *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry..."* He recalled sitting in church as a teenager; after sharing communion—sharing the 'bread of life. But he was a teenager; and he was still hungry. I remember that, too.

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry..." It's never valid to use a verse from one book of the Bible to interpret a verse from another. Each book stands complete, and yet each book fits into specific place in the jigsaw puzzle of testimony. If a piece is missing, the puzzle has a hole in it; but the pieces don't fit just any hole. You can't just shuffle them and put them where you want them; and you'll have difficulty understanding each piece unless you have the whole picture before you.

John's gospel is written to a Gentile church two or three generations after Pentecost. By then, the church was identified as distinct from its Jewish beginnings. The separation had occurred; the church had its own liturgies and writings. John was familiar with the other gospels and with the epistles of Paul.

Matthew, on the other hand, a generation or two earlier, was still connecting the dots between Judaism and Christian discipleship. The Sermon on the Mount is a Jewish monologue in the style of the rabbis. The Beatitudes in that sermon include, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness…" It doesn't interpret John's "Bread of life;" but it does offer a different angle on hunger: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness…"

I think John Dominic Crossan identifies one of the greatest challenges facing Christianity in that quote I frequently share: "My point, once again, is not that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them

symbolically, but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally." And I think that quote needs to be tacked on our mental bulletin boards as we look at today's Scripture.

Jesus has fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish… twelve baskets of leftovers. Then he and the disciples have crossed to the other side of the lake—the disciples rowing, and Jesus walking on the water.

The next day the crowds follow in their own boats, and the conversation that follows reminds us that John's narratives frequently function at two levels: the one level leaving the people in the stories confused; but the second level is for John's readers—or perhaps his hearers, because much of John's material is sermon.

Things like rebirth, running water (usually translated "living" water), blindness, light, and even life itself, carry double meanings. So today's reading follows the multiplication of loaves, therefore, "bread" takes on a symbolic meaning, with Jesus ending up declaring, "I am the bread of life."

The crowds don't get it. "Yeah, yeah, yeah… We know about that—Moses and the manna in the wilderness and all that." Jesus says, "Moses didn't do that! God did that! And it's God who gives you true bread from heaven."

Of course, the people don't get it. They're into full bellies. John doesn't tell us about Jesus' temptation; but the issues are here in this story. In the other gospels, Jesus is tempted to claim his role as Christ by turning stones into bread—feeding the multitudes. In John, he feeds the multitude, and the people want to proclaim him king! Which is why he leaves that area. See the connection?

Whenever, wherever, and in whomever the Word becomes flesh, according to John, it's not about a free lunch! After Jesus feeds the 5,000, the crowd chases after him like children chasing a clown who's throwing candy in a parade. And Jesus' response is, "***You're looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Don't work for food that perishes but for food that endures for eternal life,"*** and John's double meanings light up like a Christmas tree.

The conversation proceeds out of a question from the people: a question Jesus answers at a deeper level than it was asked: "Rabbi, when did you come here?" For John, the preacher, this is an important theme. It's introduced the first time Jesus speaks in John's Gospel. John the Baptist has pointed him out and said, ***"Look, here is the Lamb of God!"***

Two of John's disciples followed Jesus and Jesus turned and asked, ***"What are you looking for?"*** They said to him, *"Rabbi where are you staying?"* Jewish people had a variety of hopes and images of the coming Messiah. John had said, "Lamb of God." Is Jesus the one? But most of John's readers were not Jews, so, John didn't insist they first learn Jewish tradition and look for Messiah. John, the preacher, has

Jesus ask, *"What are you looking for?"* Every human, Jewish or not, is "looking for something" to fulfill life. John expresses that quest in universal human symbols: bread, water, light, life, truth, the way, and to each of these human longings, the Johannine Jesus says, "I'm it," literally, "I am." (Seven "I Am" statements of Jesus)

"What are you looking for?" Jesus asks, and John's disciples respond, *"Where are you staying?"* In today's reading, Jesus has fed the multitude, and they've chased him to the other side of the lake, and when they find him, they ask, *"Rabbi, when did you come here?"* When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, the crowd is going nuts, yelling, "Crucify him!" Pilate can't figure it out, so he asks Jesus, *"Where are you from?"* "What planet are you from?"

In the last decade or two of the first century, when the body of Johannine writings was coming together, a central question of the church was, "Where is Jesus?" The first generation had expected his immediate return from heaven. It had not happened.[1]

Where are you from? Where are you staying? When did you get here?

In today's reading, Jesus' response is, *"You're looking for me for all the wrong reasons."* Now, Jesus wasn't ignoring the people's physical needs; after all, he just fed 5,000, just because they were hungry! But life is more than eating, and until the crowds understand that, they won't really grasp who Jesus is, what he is about, and where he can be found.

"You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs…" Signs is another theme in John—preeminent Johannine scholar, Raymond Brown, calls the first 12 chapters "The Book of Signs." For John, the signs point to the saving act of God in the Christ event.

Remember the ancient Asian metaphor of "Fingers that Point to the Moon?" If one is looking at the fingers, one will never see the moon. If on is focusing on whether a particular miracle "really happened," one has not really seen the sign, even if one's stomach is full of miraculous bread.[2]

John's Gospel addresses a church still asking, "Where is Jesus?" Their question is the question of our generation—the question of those looking for "Signs of the times…"

A rabbi was asked, "Where was your God when Hitler was gassing your people?" The rabbi answered, "God was there in the ovens with his people."

The skeptic and the agnostic ask, where was Jesus at Columbine High School or Virginia Tech or Robb Elementary school in Uvalde, Texas or Marjory Stoneman

[1] Craddock, Fred B.; Boring, M. Eugene Boring. *The People's New Testament Commentary* (p. 292-293). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

[2] Ibid., p. 309.

Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida?

It is the question of those who expect God to step in and take accountability for the lives and the societies we have created.

Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness…

Jesus' response is twofold: first, "Your ancestors were hungry again the next day, and the next, and the next, because they were doing nothing to take accountability for their own lives. They were holding Moses accountable. You're still asking for bread that perishes, because you want me to be accountable for your lives."

And second, you're speaking in the past tense: "Our ancestors ate…" The bread my father gives (present tense), is bread that endures. And I am that bread.

At the table we frequently remember Jesus' words: "This is my body, which will be given for you." Almost every Sunday I remember a phrase that frequently was included in Nolan's communion prayers: "May this bread become for us the Body of Christ, so that we may become the Body of Christ for the world."

That's true bread.

Prayer Slide