

Sermon

Pentecost 9 Year B

John 6:1-21

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

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.

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

Prayer: In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit....

Sermon:

Matthew, Mark and Luke apparently compared notes, ⁱ

Because their Gospels are a lot alike. ⁱⁱ

But John's Gospel shows a different side of Jesus.

John saw Jesus differently than Matthew, Mark and Luke. ⁱⁱⁱ

John Gospel is sort of breathless. It's one thing after another!

He bounces from feeding 5,000 people, ^{iv}

who want to make Jesus the King,

To Jesus hiding in the mountains.

Then, it gets dark, and Jesus' guys run off on him.

And then, Jesus comes after them, walking on the Water!!!

Jesus says: "Chill you guys. Don't be afraid. I've got your back".

That same day, Jesus fed the 5000

with a lunch pail of fish and bread.

Jesus can do an awful lot, with very little.

Some preachers and some professors,

Describe these miracles as signs of God's great power.

Which they are.

Some see God as vast and unapproachable, and people as small.

But today's Gospel isn't about how small people are.^v

It's about how big God is!

Today's Gospel is about how much good we can do, with God's help.

Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish.

But those loaves and fishes were the result of human labor.

Today's Gospel shows us how much we can do, with God's help,

even when we start with very little. ^{vi}

God's point is simply this:

Wherever you are. Whoever you are. Get started!

No matter who we are or how little we have to offer,

God wants us to get going. And God will work with us.

Jesus fed the 5000 with a kid's lunch pail of fish and bread.

God loves a heart that fearlessly shares its last morsel.

The list of things we can be afraid, in life, is a mile long.

Is it rising seas, and coastal flooding, or

food shortages and economic collapse?

Is it taxes, and guns and gangs, or injustice and bad politicians?

The ancient world, was a lot like ours ...

wrapped in hunger and fear, chaos and shortage.

Fear and uncertainty have been mixed with blessings and grace,

since someone discovered fire ...

and ten minutes later burnt her hand.

Every generation faces its challenges and uncertainties.

And yet, every day, Jesus works miracles and changes lives.

Feeding 5000? *No problem.*

Calming an errant sea? *Been there, done that.*

That's nothing compared to calming the rage

of a heartbroken addict, and healing his family,

even as he fades from ALS. *(God bless you, Coach!)*

Bad stuff happens.^{vii} Life can be really scary.

No matter who you are, or where, or when, you live.^{viii}

Life can be really scary.

And it's too short, anyway, isn't it? It's too short.

I wish I'd met Medgar Evers, and John, and Martin and Bobby,
and Abraham. Wish I could ride a horse with Ronald Reagan.

Fixing the *whole world* is too big for us.

So, God only asks us to work on the broken parts,
that She puts in our path.

God only asks us, with Jesus's help, to help heal,
our little part of the broken world.

And that we must do.

The rolling, waves on Lake Gennesaret

were symbols of life's uncontrollable chaos.

John wrote that the Disciples were "*terrified*".^{ix}

They felt the kind of fear where there's no escape.

The kind of fear that, if you're saved,
you can hardly believe you're alive.

The kind of fear that you know the only reason
you made it out was that God heard your prayers,
and stood by your side.

God does hear our prayers. God does stand by our side.

Jesus is the miracle worker.

God asks us, with Jesus's help, to help heal
our little part of the broken world.

And that we must do. *Faith always wins.*

--AMEN

ⁱ It is often suggested that they relied on single source, never actually found, called "Q".

ⁱⁱ Often called the "synoptic" (i.e., one eye) Gospels because they see Jesus similarly and use similar stories and structure.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 4 Gospel's don't always match. But today's Gospel is special. It's in all four Gospels!

^{iv} The "five barley loaves" (vs. 9) mater, in part because barely was not as toasty or easy to digest as wheat, which the peel in question were too poor to afford. Please recall 2 Kings 4:42-44 in which one hundred people were fed with a few barley loaves and a fish. There is a clear link between that OT story and today's Gospel.

^v We already know that God is great, and that God is good.

^{vi} Of course God will carry the heavy load. But God asks for us to kick in, too.

^{vii} Gun violence happens. Covid is happening. There are kids with AR's and semi-automatic handguns. There was Waco, Ruby Ridge and Monica-gate. Jim Jones, Kool-Aid and Watergate. Bad stuff does happen. I've had classmates with PTSD, or poisoned by Agent Orange. I've befriended Vet's, who treated their wounds with weed or booze. Vietnam, Korea, and WW II. I've seen holes in buildings left over from WW I. I made friends with a Rwandan bishop – who lost his whole family.

^{viii} Back in law school --- another life – we read about Sacco and Vanzetti, and anarchist rebels setting off bombs. On and On and On.

^{ix} "Terrified" (NIV, NRSV), is phobeō (see, "phobia"), which means "to be in an apprehensive state, be [very] afraid" (See, BDAG 1060, 1a). The Greek word blends "terror" and "awe".