

## *What Are You Hungry For?*

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John 6:1-21

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Most of you know that Bob and I are used to living in big cities. Well, one of the things that big cities offer is an unending source of restaurants. We enjoyed eating Indian food, Vietnamese food, Mediterranean food, and of course Mexican food (which you can get pretty much any place in Texas!).

With all those choices before us when we wanted to go out to eat, a common question you would hear one of us ask was “what are you hungry for, or what sounds good to you tonight?”

That’s the question I would like to pose to you today as well. But as you may guess, I’m not talking about where you want to go for lunch after worship today.

Our lectionary reading for today and the next four weeks takes us away from Mark’s gospel and to the gospel of John. Starting today, we will be studying the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. This chapter is all about The Bread of Life.

Our lesson today is about Jesus feeding the 5000—that would be 5000 *men*—so that means, he actually fed way more than 5000. But wait, that’s not all! The designers of the lectionary decided also to include the story of Jesus walking on water in this week’s lesson, which upon first glance may not seem to fit with the feeding story, but we will soon discover it’s place in this section of readings.

All four gospels include a story of Jesus feeding a multitude. In fact, this is the only miracle story told in all 4 gospels.

In John, nothing is at appears on the surface—the stories always have layered meanings. One of the most important things to understand about this Gospel is that in this book, there is no doubt as to John’s understanding of the divinity of Christ. In the other gospels, the identity of Jesus as the Son of God is often kept a secret or not revealed until the very end. Not so in John. Remember how this gospel begins? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Jesus is the Word, and John lays this out clearly from the beginning so the reader will have no doubt that Jesus Christ and God are one.

There are several distinctive notes in John’s account of this story that you will not find in the other Gospels. The first is the mention that this story took place around the time of the Passover. This may seem like an insignificant detail, however, I want you to remember who one of the leading characters in the Passover was.

In the previous chapter, Jesus had just had a long discussion with the Jewish authorities about healing on the Sabbath. He brought his argument to a close with the words *If you believed Moses, then you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?*

Moses would best be known to the Jews for his leadership in the deliverance of the Hebrew people out of Egypt—namely, for the Passover that was the culmination of God’s deliverance.

When you begin to compare how God worked through Moses and how God is present in this story, there really is quite a long list. The sixth chapter of John really is sort of an echo chamber of the Exodus story of the Hebrew people.

Both this story in John and Moses’ story involved feeding. A feeding that only God could provide—the manna in the desert and the feeding of a multitude from 5 barley loaves and two pickled fish.

In both stories, the people were told to pick up any food that was left over as to not go to waste.

There is a story of deliverance through or from water in both Moses’ life—the story of the parting of the Red Sea, and the deliverance from the storm in our story for today.

The mountain is where Moses encountered God in the burning bush, and the mountain is where Jesus was headed with the disciples when the story in John opens.

Another distinction in the Gospel of John is that Jesus does not perform miracles—he gives signs. This is a significant word. You see, a sign is not just an event—even if it is a miracle—but a sign—like any sign we think of in our world today—a traffic sign, a directional sign, etc, --points us to something else. The signs Jesus performed pointed his followers to another reality—a hidden truth that is in plain sight. That Jesus is the Word made flesh that lives and walks with them.

Another significant word I would like you to notice is the word **where**, that is used in verse 5. When Jesus noticed the large crowd gathering, he asked Philip where are we to buy bread for these people to eat. It says right in the text that this was a test for Philip—to see if he realized the point Jesus wanted to make. He didn’t. There was no bread that needed to be bought. Jesus **IS** the Bread of Life.

It would be a mistake for us, at this point if we get caught up trying to explain this sign Jesus gave to the people—to get caught up in the miraculous, the non-scientific way in which over 5000 people were fed on such a small amount of food. **That** is not the point of this story. One

commentary I read said to do that would be like spending an evening in a fabulous restaurant reading the menu and never enjoying the food. The signs Jesus perform point to the feast, so EAT, and don't just read the menu!

That is really what this story is about— it's about **where** to find the bread, and at what price. It is not about the ability of Jesus to perform miracles or signs as John calls them, because he can. But that is not what Jesus wants us to know. Jesus *does* fill us with good things to eat, Jesus does calm the storms in our lives, but all these signs, like I said earlier, point to another reality. They point to the power of God. THAT is what Jesus wants us to know.

When we feast on Jesus, we will still have problems. We will have money problems, we will experience relationship issues, we may get laid off from our job, or be diagnosed with cancer, but---Jesus promises us that we will never be empty. "I am the Bread of Life," Jesus said. "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever." With Christ in our lives, we will never be empty.

To be a Christian, to be here worshipping God today, is to see God and experience God face to face. We experience the risen Christ each time we partake of the elements in the Lord's Supper. We are washed in the cleansing waters of forgiveness each time we are a part of a Baptism and even remember our own Baptism, when we were claimed by God. You may experience the power of God in a hymn we sing or a prayer that is said.

With Christ we can launch out onto uncharted seas—we can go forward with no star to guide us when Christ is in our boat. When we feel all hope is lost, it is Christ who comes to us and says "It is I, do not be afraid."

### I am the Bread of Life.

How many times are we like the people in our lesson today, and want to see Jesus as a wonder worker? In verse 14, the people begin to realize that this just may be the prophet that was promised to them—the prophet that would deliver them from their oppression. The prophet that could give them whatever they wanted.

But Jesus would not be manipulated when the people wanted to take him by force and make him king.

Jesus didn't come to give us what we want

He came to BE what we want

Jesus didn't come to perfect our lives

He came to GIVE his life for us.

Jesus was not there *just* to serve their immediate needs—that being hunger. He was there for so much more. **HE** did not want the glory for the sign he performed for them. That should be given to his Father. They were not catching on, and about to take him by force, so he took off—to the

mountain by himself. The mountain in biblical stories--where God is so often revealed to those who are looking.

By this time, it is evening, and the disciples have taken off in their boat. I like the line in the second half of verse 17—"It was still dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them." Do you see the double meaning here? It was dark because it was nighttime, but it was also dark because the light, the goodness, the peace of Christ was not with them in their boat. The disciples were in the dark, so to speak, about who Jesus was—the power and glory of God.

Well a big storm came up and their little boat was tossed to and fro. Suddenly, they saw Jesus coming toward them—walking on water! They were pretty freaked out, I'm sure. Then Jesus spoke to them, "It is I, do not be afraid."

Then, they wanted to take Jesus in their boat—meaning they finally recognized him for who he was. A very interesting point here, I think. Notice, that is says nothing about the storm being calmed, but they were immediately on the other shore, for they recognized him for who he was.

My prayer for us today is that we, as a congregation will see Jesus for who he is as well. Karen Marie Yust commented on this passage and said that we should not simply decide what is reasonable to undertake to meet the basic needs of those around us. Instead, ministry is about multiplying resources so that what might have been a social handout actually becomes of revelation of God's grace.

The church is not a social service agency, or a social club. We are not even a moral improvement society. We are the body of Christ, and we are called to reveal the glory of God to others through those divine face-to-face encounters we experience every day.

When we hand out bags of food from our food pantry, of course we are helping hungry folks, but more importantly, we are revealing God's grace, God's power and God's glory to those we serve.

We are called to live in that paradox of believing God can do the impossible and the realities of our world. Through meeting God face to face here each week in worship, we are equipping ourselves to do that. "Do not be afraid, it is I," said Jesus. When we feast on Christ we will **never** be empty and we will never have to ask ourselves *what* we are hungry for today. Amen.