

## Being Nourished

Have you ever sat down and given thought to what actually nourishes you? Superficially our culture is always ready to give us answers about what is “good for us”—everywhere you look you can see advertisements for the latest and best ways to diet, to exercise, the newest and greatest lifestyles to achieve happiness...but from the observations that can easily be made about our culture...it does not seem to me that these things are working out very well...it doesn't seem like the answers being suggested most loudly and frequently are very successful in being truly nourishing. There are many calls for life to return to “normal”, and in fact, this congregation is going to be making one of those moves next Sunday...we are moving our morning worship service back into the sanctuary...but these calls for “normality” seem to me to be like many refrains I have heard before...when I was much younger and heard older folks yearning for those “good old days” just because they did not like change. The truth that we have to face is that we can return to doing some things like we did them in 2019, to the ways that we did before the virus changed our ways so drastically, but we cannot change the fact that that virus is here and is here to stay and will continue to change lives and affect the ways we live. It seems that in this time when so much has been disrupted we have an opportunity to really think about what things are important in our lives...to consider that question what are the things which nourish us. Both of the lectionary passages for today focus on a message about being fed in a miraculous way...the providing for many from what seems to be a meager amount of material. The gospel message which John narrates renders the feeding of the five thousand in a unique way combining elements of the Passover story in Exodus and the feeding miracle of Elisha from 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings which we also read this morning. These make the connection of Jesus to the powerful prophets of old, while at the same time John emphasizes that Jesus is greater and more. The passage from John begins by telling us that the large crowds that are gathered are there because they saw the “signs that he was doing for the sick.” Embedded within this introduction is the information it occurs near the time of Passover; that Jesus went “up the mountain” like Moses; that he sat down with his disciples which how instructions were given. The parallels to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings passage are more obvious in the skepticism of Elisha's servant to the sufficiency of the twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain which were brought to him to serve to feed the one hundred people. Elisha's words to his servant were: “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” When this was done, they ate and had some left. In all the gospel accounts, although some details vary, the basics remain the same: there is a large crowd that needs to be fed and it seems little resource to accomplish it. According to John's narrative the skeptic is Phillip who states: “Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” While another disciple Andrew, relates: “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Of course, within John's narration he includes the aside that Jesus allowed this conversation to test the disciple because Jesus knew he was going to provide enough for everyone, which of course is what he does. Jesus takes the loaves and fish and after giving thanks over them distributes them among the people who eat as much as they want...and when they are satisfied, Jesus has the fragments gathered up so “nothing may be lost.” The leftovers amounted to twelve full baskets. This story ends differently in John as he narrates that the people who witnessed what he did that day wanted

to make him king by force, so Jesus withdrew from them going up on the mountain again. John then goes on to relate story of another sign of Jesus' identity, his coming to the disciples walking across the water. What we do not hear in any of the gospel accounts is what, if any, effect what those people witnessed that day had on them afterwards. Did they experience a greater sense of possibility and hope afterward? Did it change their lives in any way or was it just a meal that filled them. Since this story is told in one form or another in all four of the gospels, it seems it must have been life-changing for many. If you Google this by the name by which it is commonly known "Loaves and Fishes" gospel, you will find your screen swamped by over 908,000 entries. Many people have many thoughts on what this story means. What do we take from these narratives for our lives today? In a world starving for fulfillment, Jesus sets a table of love every day. Unfortunately, the bread of life is passed over by so many who seek the latest confection which the world offers to fill their emptiness. In this gospel passage Jesus invites us to his feast. His basket of grace is bottomless. If we come to him as God and Savior, we will never go away unfulfilled. This narrative is God's word to us on many levels. Jesus is telling us to come to him in our want. Bring our meager scraps of faith and he will turn them into a feast of fulfillment, giving them back to us in a superabundance of grace which satisfies a longing which nothing else will. Jesus explains the mystery of salvation by playing out in this tableau of an impromptu picnic. The Messiah, God and Man in one has come among us. His bounty to us is bottomless. He offers eternal life, it is there for the taking. He only asks that we come as we are, bringing all that we have...our struggling faith and our flawed love. What we give him will be blessed and miraculously multiplied on a cosmic scale. By his grace we will then be satisfied beyond our imagining. Yet too many of us see this feast of salvation as something that lies over a distant horizon. But Jesus is not here with us to take reservations for a future banquet in a far distant time. We need his grace right here, right now. Here is where we struggle...here is where we need his strength the most. And right here, right now...in his Word...in our worship, in our fellowship...in our outreach...in our doing of the ministry that he has called us into...here is where we are fed...this is where and how we are nourished. But make no mistake, Jesus does not feed us abundantly so we can become spiritually self-absorbed...basking in his favor...indolent in his service. We are meant to put all this ingestion of energy given to us by his abundance to work. In faith we must shoulder our cross...facing the challenges of our days...enduring disappointments...forgiving betrayals. But far beyond that, we must be Christ's hands in this broken world...working to build the kingdom, witnessing his love in all that we say and do. Where we tend to see scarcity and scraps, God creates abundance. Where we see emptiness and depression, God can create profound fulfillment and boundless joy. In his love we are nourished and protected. He is the bread of life, infinitely enriched and multiplied for our salvation. Come to his feast...and you will never walk away hungry. Live in his love...and the feast never ends. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.