

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today we find ourselves in John chapter 6. We will stay in John's gospel for the rest of the summer except for the Feast of Mary Mother of Our Lord in a few weeks. After that, we will get back to Mark's gospel which is the focal gospel for this liturgical year.

Now John is a special gospel. It's not one of the synoptic gospels, which are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so John tells stories with a different emphasis. There are so many unique differences between the gospels that all four gospels only agree on one miracle, and we heard it today. It's the feeding of the 5,000.

And I get why all four gospels chose this one to include. It's memorable. Bread is something everyone can connect with, no matter the type. Carbohydrates are delicious. Hunger is something we've all experienced. Sharing food is important to our species. And, it's a story that speaks of power and possibility.

You see, there is power in bread. We see it played out in politics when the removal of WIC and LINK benefits are weaponized to control others. Far too often churches and nonprofit organizations are quick to give just enough bread to build dependency or coerce people to attend religious services, while ignoring systemic changes needed for a just distribution of resource and policies that promote life. Governments, regimes, and groups use the

supply of food or the withholding of food to manipulate others into specific actions, treaties, or stances. Indeed, the statement “wars are lost and won with bread” reminds us of the power of bread and its impacts on nations. And, in Jesus’ time it was no different, for kings would often enforce their power by distributing and withholding bread.

But today’s story wasn’t completely absent of bread. There was bread, but there was a problem: there were 5,000 people and only five barley loaves, and two fish. The disciple Andrew says, “what good are five loaves and two fish in this crowd?” It’s a question that insinuates the desire to throw in the towel. Some might say, it was a logical question. Others might argue that it was commonsense. And that’s the thing about Jesus’ act, it was non-sensical, illogical, and absurd. And, what makes it even more ridiculous is that after 5,000 people ate, there was MORE bread than they started with.

In John’s telling of the story, we heard that Jesus was the one who distributed the bread and fish, not the disciples. Jesus is the one who provided access and life. Jesus shared and made a statement. It was this action that communicates that our God provides abundantly. It’s a reminder that in the moments when we think there could never be enough and at times when all seems lost and impossible, it is in *that* moment where our God will do something unthinkable, something so illogical that it only can be attributed to God.

And this story of satisfying the gathering’s hunger is as much about bread and fish as it is about God’s expansive provision. For, how often do we hunger beyond our bellies? We hunger for justice in a world that abuses and

takes advantage of women, queer people, BIPOC individuals, and those on the margins. We feel our bellies rumble as we seek meaningful friendships, community, and romantic partnership. Hunger pains are felt when we seek a sense of purpose or meaning in our lives, work, or hobbies. We humans hunger for adventure, security, growth, fulfillment, and so much more than only bread.

So, too this today's story is not only about feeding 5,000 with bread and fish, but it's also about another miracle. It's the miracle of Jesus walking on water. And John's version did not have Peter stepping out of the boat, Jesus did not rebuke the wind and waves, and it was not only about Jesus and the disciples getting to where they're going. This story is deeply Jewish and relates to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Let's think back to a key character in the Jewish faith – Moses. Last Sunday, we heard the beginning of Moses' story as he was pulled out of a basket in the water and became an adopted prince of Egypt even though he was born to a Hebrew family. Eventually, Moses knew of his Hebrew roots and, with the help of God, liberated the Hebrews from slavery. Just before the ruler, called Pharaoh, let the Hebrew people go, the people celebrated first Passover. At the Passover meal, unleavened *bread* was eaten because there wasn't time to let the dough rise before they needed to leave. And after they were released, they escaped through the Red Sea on dry ground, almost as if they were walking on *water*. You see, this central story in Judaism is one of liberation. It's also about water and bread, just like Jesus's miracles in today's reading.

You see today's story is as old as time itself. For our God hovered over the waters in creation, our God provided bread from above to the people wandering in the wilderness, and our God promises to continue providing all we need. And not provide just enough but rather God will provide an abundance. And it's not a coincidence that the sacraments we celebrate as Lutherans involve bread at this table and water at this font. For these are reminders that God is here and that God is with us for all eternity.

And as we come to see God's abundance in the Scriptures, so too we can come to recognize it in our lives. It's friends and family at baby showers, wedding showers, and special gatherings. It's the sharing of a meal or holding the door open for someone. It's a capital campaign that has already raised over \$950,000 from members, former members, and community members who want to share God's presence. It's our acknowledgment that we have a beautiful building to share, and our willingness to give of our abundance to 12-step groups, summer camps, and concerts. It's God's ever-present reminder that there is enough food, there are enough homes, and there are enough resources in this world to be shared abundantly with all those we encounter. That is the gift of today's reading, and the gift of God.

So, I hope that today's reading reminds us that our God, from the beginning, has provided for all. I pray that we acknowledge that we have enough feed hungry bodies, to nurture hungry souls, and to allow God's abundance to be felt through our actions. May we remember God's abundance and look for opportunities to share our abundance with others in all that we do. Amen.