

Sermon 21.07.25

Psalm 23: 1-3

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

John 6: 1-15

After this 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 towards 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.

SERMON 7/25/21

Hello brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ...

I don't use that greeting lightly. I have 6 siblings - a family of 7 children. We are different - very different in some ways, can be challenging to bridge those differences at times, but the bonds of family are strong. Very strong.

You are my siblings in Christ. Each other's brothers and sisters, with Christ as the center, the one who holds us together.

Let's look at the text - so much going on!

This is the only miracle found in all 4 gospels. John has some key differences and some specifics that bear a close look.

Walk through details of text:

We start with Jesus and his disciples on the move with

a large crowd that kept following him - these people who were hungering to be with him - to see the signs (that's John's word for miracles) that Jesus has been doing.

Then we're told "The passover was near"

That's an important piece. It's shortly before the Passover and Jesus is not in Jerusalem, the crowds are not going to the temple for the sacrifice, they are here, following Jesus.

This is a new way of experiencing this time of Passover - this central religious experience. They are not in the temple, they are here, on a hillside near the sea of Galilee, 120 KM from Jerusalem. A walk of several days. The crowd has followed Jesus here. Something new is happening.

When Jesus looks up and sees this big crowd, gathering around them,
Jesus asks a question - one to see how his closest companions might answer.

'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' Where, not how, not should be, but where.

Philip replies - "Six months wages wouldn't be enough to give everybody a bite!"

Philip sees only scarcity - not enough. Can't do it - what are you asking of us, Jesus?

Andrew - he has a seed, a glimmer of possibility, which he names, and then dismisses.

Andrew, has a slightly larger range of vision for possibility, but he, too, is looking through the lens of those of us who count and plan and want to make sure there's enough before doing anything risky like trying to feed a crowd.

And yet Andrew names that possibility - as small and insignificant as it may seem.

Jesus' reply: make them sit down. He doesn't argue, he simply says make them sit down

Here's another detail worth noting -

Where? In a place of lots of grass. "He makes me lie down in green pastures"

They are in a pasture, a crowd that is getting restless with hunger, and Jesus tells them to sit down, to rest, to be ready to receive. We have an illusion to the shepherd knowing his flock and caring for them. Jesus the good shepherd.

Jesus took the loaves - these 5 loaves. He took what was there, this meager amount - and blessed it.

In this moment near Passover - here they are, not preparing the sacrificial lamb at the temple, but here, in a pasture, with Jesus taking loaves and fish, giving thanks using the same word - (yoo-khar-is-teh'o)

, Eucharist, in the breaking of the bread on the night he was betrayed.

And, we're told - HE handed them out to all who were sitting there. The other 3 gospels all have the disciples handing out the bread and fish. Here, we have Jesus moving around, sharing this nourishment with the people. Feeding the flock until they were satisfied.

This huge crowd - 5,000 in all. In those days, this number would have meant something to the gospel reader -

5,000 - the size of an army.

A hungry army, looking for signs, miracles, looking to be fed, looking to have their souls restored.

And once they were fed,

When they saw this sign, they wanted to make him king. This army was ready for a new king.

King's - kings born out of our politics - work out of scarcity, they withhold bread, they make you pay, again and again. There's rarely enough. Kings demand payment.

Jesus' way is not our way.

Jesus' way is not transactional.

Jesus' way is one of abundance, where everyone is fed.

We live in a transactional world. We are overwhelmed by change, by choices, by feeling like we don't have enough - time, money, energy...

We are like the disciples.

What does Jesus tell them to do?

Not go make the bread, not go to the villages and scour every shop.

No - sit down.

All of you, sit down. Sit down on the green grass. I am the Good Shepherd. I know my flock. (John 11). I know what you need. There is abundance, there is enough, right here. No need for transactions. Receive God's grace.

Jesus took the bread - the little bit that was found. Perhaps from this young one in their midst who was trying to make a few pennies, trying to help provide for his family, by selling his 5 barley loaves and 2 fish.

All sorts followed Jesus - those who were intrigued by the One who does miracles; those who were hungry; those who saw the crowd as an opportunity to make some money.

Jesus fed them all. Cared for them all. Hopefully paid the boy for his bread and fish, AND fed him too.

Here, at this time of Passover, the crowds are not flocking to Jerusalem, to the temple, to the old ways. The crowds are following Jesus to a new space, where he tells them to sit down. To be open to new ways.

And the crowd, like us, isn't sure what to do with these invitations to new ways.

First they want to make him king. He's provided - fed them, asking nothing of them, caring for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep. They want him to be in charge of their lives, get rid of the oppressive systems that dominate their lives.

A few verses later, in this chapter, (John 6:30)

THE NEXT DAY!

The crowd is again skeptical, asking - "So what sign are you going to give to show us we should believe in you?" (This is after 2 miracles)

Then later in the chapter... (John 6:60-66)

Many of his disciples (more than the 12) 'we can't put up with this kind of talk! This teaching is too difficult'

Jesus was asking them to change their ways.
Changing our ways is HARD.

Jesus was aware of their murmuring in protest...

And we're told "from this time on, many of the disciples broke away and wouldn't remain in the company of Jesus. Jesus then said to the Twelve, 'Are you going to leave me, too?'"

Change is hard. Jesus invited those around him to experience worship in all sorts of ways. To experience God's abundance by sitting down in a field of grass...by lying down in green pastures...

They are not in Jerusalem. Not in the temple, but following the Good Shepherd where he leads. Celebrating the eucharist in a field full of hungry people.

It's an anxious time. Scarcity for the disciples. A whole army to manage, to feed, to teach. How will we do it, they wonder?

Jesus offers a new way.

How about us?

We're about to start something new next Sunday - CATT.

For some of us, this feels like an exciting new way to gather, to be community with one another. To sit, not in this familiar place, but in back yards and around tables.

AND It's causing anxiety for some, murmuring for some. It's not meeting in ways and places that are familiar. It's doing something new.

It's change.

Change is hard.

And yet we're not alone. Lots of details. Lots of questions. I've had anxiety related to scarcity... feel like Philip and Andrew.

Some of the details and logistics we'll get wrong. But with Jesus at the center, with Jesus guiding us, we have nothing to fear.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Our good shepherd.

Jesus leads his followers to new places, new ways of being together, of being community.

Jesus takes this army of hungry, tired followers, those who are sick and tired of the system in which they live, and refuses to be their King. He does not work by domination and oppression.

Jesus works by invitation. Come, follow me. Lie down in green pastures, have your souls restored.

Can we notice, even name our anxieties, and not let them blind us, keep us from experiencing ways that Christ is here in our midst?

CATT is a new way of being church. It's an experiment of living into fellowship that might make us a little uncomfortable. It might ask us to give up our comfortable ways of sitting in the pews, waiting to be nourished, and instead sit elsewhere, around a different table, in a new setting.

The good news?

Christ continues to surprise.

Christ continues to supply our needs.

Christ is the Good Shepherd, here and now.

We don't walk this walk alone.

Jesus had many disciples grumbling, turning back, saying no, this is too difficult; too hard.

I ask you to notice the discomfort that CATT might bring up for you - and maybe the excitement too.

Wherever you find yourselves...

I ask you to keep Christ at the center.

To step into this 4 time experiment of Church around the table with some grace -

Maybe you'll be surprised. How might Christ show up in our midst and feed us in ways we didn't expect? How might the abundance Jesus offers nourish us in ways we can't even imagine?

Who knows, maybe there will be leftovers - baskets full of sustenance that continues to nourish and feed us.

With Christ at the Center, let us bring our weary, anxious selves to sit down in God's presence and find abundance in and through him.

Resources:

<https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper12b>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/794-9th-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-17b-july-25-2021>