

Last week we heard how people were bringing their sick friends and relatives to Jesus for healing. We heard how his name as a healer had spread throughout not just Galilee but into the Gentile regions around the Sea of Galilee as well. Today we find ourselves hearing the feeding of the multitude and Jesus walking on water from the Gospel of John. The setting of these two miracle stories has a different setting in the Gospel of John than in the Gospel of Mark that we have been reading. In Mark's gospel the disciples had just returned from being sent out in pairs to various villages to heal and teach. But in John's gospel Jesus has just confronted the Jewish religious authorities on how he surpasses Moses when the authorities questioned his healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus has just said, *If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.* (John 5:46) So the two miracle stories that follow are showing that while Moses is God's greatest prophet, Jesus is one with God! The feeding of the multitudes demonstrates the abundance that God has to offer us, if we will be open to God's grace in our lives.

Jesus goes up the mountain and the crowd follows him. He turns to Philip, one of his disciples and asks him where are they going to get bread to feed the crowd. Philip, looking out at the sea of people gathered there, it is 5,000 without counting the women and children, says that there is no way they can feed this many people. Now Philip would have been with Jesus at the wedding in Cana and seen how Jesus provided an enormous amount of wine for the guests, an overflowing abundance of wine. But Philip and then Andrew see only what is right in *front* of them, a crowd of hungry people and fail to perceive who is standing *next* to them! So they respond as any of us probably would and basically tell Jesus there is no way they can feed this many people, look they don't have the money and all that is available is five loaves and two fish. But Jesus, with the abundance of God's grace, takes the meager resources that are available, blesses the food and then he distributes the bread and then the fish to all who are gathered there.

Now think back to the Israelites in the wilderness, they told Moses how they were starving and needed bread to eat. Moses turned to God and said, *Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!'* (Num 11:13) And God gives them manna in the wilderness. And all ate and were satisfied. Jesus gave the people bread to eat and they were satisfied. God once again provided manna in the wilderness. Where Philip saw only a lack of funds and Andrew saw scarcity of resources, Jesus, through God's grace, provided more than the people needed. There was abundance with twelve baskets of leftovers!

The crowd's reaction is to make Jesus a king. He has supplied their physical needs by healing and feeding them. They want to honor Jesus and continue to depend on him, but in the terms of their culture, not because they realize who he truly is, God incarnate. Nor are they probably willing to be transformed themselves as followers of Jesus. No, make him king then we will know how to act and what to expect from him! So Jesus withdraws by himself to the mountain to escape the crowd, just as Moses went up the mountain by himself away from the crowd.

The next thing that occurs is that the disciples apparently decide that they are not going to wait for Jesus to come back and head across the Sea of Galilee by themselves, they are going home to Capernaum.

Now these are fishermen, but the lake is getting rough because of a strong wind that is blowing. They are struggling to row in the darkness in the face of the wind and waves. Suddenly they see Jesus walking on the sea and coming near their boat. And they are terrified! Once again they fail to know who Jesus truly is. Jesus' reaction is to tell them that, "It is I; do not be afraid." (John 6:20) The NRSV interpretation does not faithfully translate what the Greek actually says. Jesus uses the Greek term, *ego eimi*, the great "I AM" that is used for God. Jesus is saying what God told Moses in the wilderness out of the burning bush, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex. 3:14) Jesus is telling the frightened disciples that God is with them in the rough seas of the night. They don't need to be afraid. The disciples want Jesus in the boat and *and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.* (John 6:21) As soon as they allow Jesus to be with them the way was cleared for them to reach their destination. The disciples had thought that they could leave Jesus behind and go out into the dark night by themselves. They were fishermen, after all, and knew what they were doing! But as soon as they left Jesus behind rough seas appear and they are struggling. How often do we assume that, oh I went to church on Sunday, so now I can return to my daily routine. I know what I'm doing, I've been doing this for years. We have become proficient in our professions and may think that we don't need a daily spiritual practice to be in touch with Jesus. But then life throws us a situation where we are struggling and we keep trying to make it on our own, like the disciples kept rowing across the rough waters. They suddenly saw Jesus coming towards them. Suddenly we realize that a Jesus is waiting for us to see him with us in our struggle. Jesus is waiting for us to invite him into our boat, our space.

As Christians we are literally in the boat with Jesus. The word *nave*, which is what Roman Catholics and Anglicans call the space where the congregation gathers for worship, comes from the Latin word for ship. The sanctuary is the space around the altar. So each Sunday we gather in the ship to be nourished by Christ and then sent back out into the world. We leave the ship and move back out into a world that looks at resources from a point of scarcity. A world that agrees with Philip that there is a shortage of financial resources to help the hungry, or like Andrew, *there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?* (John 6:9) When we listen to Jesus our meager resources turn into an abundance. We have learned this past year that we can continue to be church through technology, even when all we had was a cell phone to stream the services. We have learned that Jesus is still with us even as we gathered virtually from our homes. By ourselves we have limited resources, but by joining with other Christians through the Mission Bell Food Pantry we have literally feed thousands of our neighbors. As one person on our Innovation Team said last week, things are possible in difficult times if we have faith. Jesus knows our needs before we ask. He will give us the bread of life. He will supply all our needs if we continue to let him bless us and the resources that we bring in trust to him. What are 5 loaves and 2 fish among so many people? More than enough when we trust in Jesus to supply our needs.