

Weekend of Sunday, July 29, 2018
10th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 17/Proper 12/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 6:1-21
Sermon Title: “But Later that Same Day”

Theme

Jesus comes into our world to bring us close to God. He is the presence of God among us, opening our eyes to the reign of God, reaching toward us in love, and embracing us with reassurance.

Text

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ 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.”

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Sermon

"My child isn't going to commune until he's been through confirmation, like I had to do. He doesn't even know what it means." one young mother told me, pointing to altar. I calmly asked, "And you know what it means?" Then I reminded her that the church, the one holy catholic and apostolic church, considers Holy Communion one of the great mysteries of the church. No one, not even the greatest theologians of the church, dare say they have it figured out – know what it means.

I have been known to say, in discussions of the theology of the Eucharist, "The Eucharist - Holy Communion - means everything that a meal means."

And what does a meal mean? Hospitality, refreshment, community, sharing, giving, sacrifice, love, pain, and all the rest. The Eucharist means all that *in the name of Jesus*. Such matters are too deep for words - too wonderful for mere human understanding.

Of course, we Lutherans celebrate two sacraments. Holy Communion being one of them, and Holy Baptism being the other one. And what does Holy Baptism mean? Baptism means everything that water means: refreshment, drowning, death, life, birth, fun, fear, power, and all the rest. Baptism means all that *in the name of Jesus*.

I'm all for instruction, education, and careful understanding of the experiences of the church, like the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. I have discipleship classes on both. But there are limits to my instruction, because these matters are too rich and deep for our human ways of understanding.

In today's gospel, John told us that it was the Passover, the holiest day for Judaism. As was his custom, Jesus gathered his disciples to teach them, but, as we learned last week from Mark's Gospel, by this time Jesus and the Twelve were always pursued by crowds of needy people and though they tried to get away to a deserted place to retreat, they followed him and as always, Jesus had compassion on them and ministered to them.

And to make matters more complicated in the story we have for today, they wouldn't leave! Have you ever hosted a party and everyone else has left except a

couple of people left who seem not to notice that they are the only ones left while you and your spouse are cleaning up and washing the dishes?

Well, that is how it was this day for the Twelve. John doesn't write it that way but other gospels do - the Twelve told Jesus to send them away! In John's telling, the Twelve simply hope Jesus will come to that conclusion answering his ridiculous question Jesus asked, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" It's a good question, right? Even today, if 5000 people showed up for worship, my first question would be the same and we have a Sparkle Market right beside us!

They did not have a Sparkle Market at their disposal. All they could come up with was the lunch of a little boy, who as it turned out, was the only one who had prepared for the day – and he only had a few loaves and some fish.

John indicated in his writing that Jesus already knew what he was going to do. There is no problem too big for Jesus, and so he commanded the crowd to be seated and then he ¹¹"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." And not only was the crowd fed, but twelve baskets full were left over! The people were amazed, hailing Jesus as ¹⁴"the prophet who is to come into the world." And while that doesn't sound terrible, in fact it sounds accurate, they wanted to take him by force and make him king! And so, he sent the Twelve on across the lake without himself so that, as I told you last week, he could retreat, reflect, commune with the Father, and then reengage ministry.

But later that same day, after he had dispatched the Twelve, the sea became rough – John doesn't say it was a storm or that they were in peril. But it was certainly dark and a dangerous time, when lo and behold, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat. *Then* they became terrified.

But Jesus once again brought peace to an otherwise chaotic situation, ²⁰"It is I; do not be afraid"

These stories are strange, wonderfully strange. And because this is the enigmatic, deep, mysterious Gospel of John, you know that the stories have meaning that are deeper than the events of each story. Here we are all in the same boat, so to speak, or jungle as the case may be, just like the disciples of Jesus. And sometimes it

grows dark, and sometimes the sea roars, and then, there on the waves and the wind, we see Jesus coming toward us, saying, "It is I; do not be afraid."

Now just to be clear, no, I have never literally seen Jesus coming toward me, but I have seen him in the face of others, even some of you. I hope others have seen Jesus in me. I can't explain this, but wouldn't we rather experience it than explain it anyway? (Little boy in the School-ager program and the wrecked couch.)

On Sunday, we sometimes stand and repeat the words of the Creed. We listen to scripture. Sometimes we make mental notes on the reading or the sermon. We have experiences in our discipleship classes when we meet and carefully, thoughtfully study the scriptures. And all that is good.

Yet perhaps even better is when Jesus comes to us, takes our meager resources, blesses and breaks them, and, wonder of wonders, there is miraculous abundance. Or, when it is night, and we grow fearful of the wind and the waves, and there he comes to us, reassuring us, saying, "It is I; do not be afraid."

All attempts to reduce the grand and glorious Christian faith to a set of moral directives, a list of positive values to be affirmed, or a collection of noble philosophical platitudes are destined for failure. The Christian faith is about the mystery of being met by Jesus, and being encountered, blessed, reassured, and fed by him. I can't go a week without it. That's why, even when I am on vacation, I find a place to worship. It is that important to me.

God forgive us for our misguided attempts to whittle down the church to a mutual admiration society, a volunteer social service organization, a moral improvement club to make nice people even nicer, and all the other pettiness we inflict upon the body of Christ.

To be a Christian - to be here - is to be among that fortunate group of people who have been with Jesus, who have looked at this Jew from Nazareth and have seen the very face of God. With him, we gather for a meager meal, break the bread, pass the cup, and are surprised to find ourselves in the presence of God. With him, we can launch out on uncharted seas, without a star to guide us, into the stormy gale. And there, just when we think all hope may be lost, hope comes to us in the form of the one who says, "It is I; do not be afraid."

"You know why I keep coming to this church?" a woman asked me once. I thought she might mention the warmth of the fellowship or surely the charming wit and handsome good looks of the preacher!

No, what she said is, "I keep coming to this church because it's here where I meet Jesus – and that keeps me coming. He comes to me, embraces me, forgives me, and because of that I can go on. Without that, why bother?"

Why bother indeed?

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My Raisin the Bar Challenge for you this week is ask you to try to make your first response to anything you encounter, to consider Jesus. Ask yourself is it him that I am seeing in this conversation with my spouse, my children, my colleague, the clerk at the store, the person driving in the car behind me. And also ask yourself, are they seeing Jesus in me?

If you do that, it will change your encounters in ways that will surprise you.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I boggles our minds to wonder what it must have been like to walk with you; to witness your preaching, teaching and performing signs and miracles; to observe your loving touch and tender compassion. And then in the words today we are reminded that you still are at work, and want to use us as your hands and feet and voice and ears. Send your Holy Spirit to provoke to be willing to be used. We pray this in your name. Amen