

**Multiplication in Times of Need**  
**The Rev. David Booman**  
**John 6. 1-15**  
**St. Michael's – September 6, 2020**

Good morning friends! It's so good to be back with you. Can you believe it's been 5 months since we last gathered for communion, to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

I'm reminded of St. Augustine who wrote of how the early-church Christians risked torture and death to meet and have communion. According to Augustine they said, 'We cannot survive without the Eucharist.'

And it just so happens, in God's perfect timing, that the passage for today is Eucharistic. The feeding of the 5,000. This is one of the most significant miracles Jesus ever did. It's the *only* miracle recorded in all four gospels.

And this miracle is framed by the concept of the kingdom of God. In the previous chapter the people are wondering if Jesus is the great prophet foretold by Moses, the Messiah. And at the end of our passage, the people try to make Jesus king. And so the whole atmosphere is charged with political frenzy, 'The messiah is here, the one who's going to overthrow the Romans and make everything right!'

My friends, we too are living in a messianic moment, aren't we? Where's God? Where's the one who's going to make things right...who's going to provide for our needs...who's going to drive this COVID menace away? Could this be the end of the world? And so we wait with eager expectation.

And as we wait and pray, this morning's passage teaches us three things about the kingdom. Three things we need to understand if we're to live with courageous faith.

1. Character of the king – what is this king really like?
2. The currency of the kingdom – what are the values of the kingdom?
3. Cost of the crown – to lead any community, there's a price.

There are dangers and risks. What is the cost to our king?

First, the character of the king. We see in this passage that Jesus really loves us. And we see this in the *nature* of the miracle. It's a feeding.

You know, what would you do if you had superpowers? I know if I'd been Jesus I'd have proved to everyone that I was God. If I'd been Jesus I'd have teleported to Rome and I'd have snapped my fingers and turned Caesar into a talking flamingo.

But no, how does Jesus use his powers? He gives sight to the blind, cleanses lepers, and feeds the hungry. The King of *Love* my Shepherd is. *This* king uses his powers not to show off, but to heal, restore, and provide.

And as an aside, we're not talking about love in a mythological kind of way. You know many skeptics say the gospels are not eyewitness accounts. They were not written by the disciples. Instead they're legendary myths written many years later by people living in distant lands.

However, I recently read a book by a Cambridge scholar who points out that our passage is filled with subtle signs that indicate an eyewitness account. Just a couple of examples...

First, why does Jesus ask Phillip where to buy the bread? Did he randomly pick Philip out of the twelve? No, the gospel of Luke tells us that this feeding took place near Bethsaida. And *John* wrote earlier that Philip was from Bethsaida. The reason Jesus asks Philip is because he was a local man who knew where to find the grocery store. And so between the two gospels we see the mark of historic authenticity.

Secondly, in verse 10 we read 'there was much grass in this place.' Just a passing comment, right, to give it a little texture? But no, we can actually check and see if this is historically plausible. Mark and John tell us the feeding took place at the time of

Passover. We know from historical records that between the years 26-36 AD, the Passover fell in the month of April. And we know from precipitation records, that the rainy season in Galilee was November through March. And so yes, the grass would have been incredibly green at the time of Passover after five months of heavy rain.

In contrast, one of my sisters watches a daily livestream of the sunrise over the sea of Galilee. And she tells me that NOW, in September, the grass is absolutely parched and brown. So again, it's unlikely that someone say, in Greece, writing this legendary story, could have nailed these historical accuracies, unless they'd been there.

Ultimately, as CS Lewis responded to those who read the gospel of John as a legend, *'I've been reading poems...legends, myths all my life. I know what they're like. I know that not one of them is like this [Gospel]. Of this text there are only two possible views. Either this is report[ing]... Or else, some unknown writer in the 2nd century, without known predecessors, or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative...The reader who doesn't see this has simply not learned to read.'*

And so the first thing we can see in this passage is that the king loves us and that this love is grounded in eyewitness reporting. The second thing we see is the currency of the kingdom. What are the *values* of Jesus' kingdom?

Well in that exchange with Philip it's very interesting, Jesus asks him, 'Where are we going to buy bread so all these people may eat?' And John comments, 'Jesus said this to test him.' But why? Why did Jesus test Philip? Because He wanted to teach Philip a lesson:

And the lesson is this, 'You are utterly inadequate.' Now this is probably not what Philip wanted to hear, but it's one of the most important things a person can learn. I'm studying a book with a group of Dads called 'How People Grow.' It's by some Christian counselors. And the authors point out that foundation of personal growth is relying utterly on God.

This is the exact opposite of the self-help industry. Which says, you are strong, beautiful, capable, possessing the divine spark, and all you need is to be self-actualized. No, what we really need to know is that we're weak and inadequate. This is why AA has been so successful. It took this principle, and made it the first of the twelve steps. 'I admit that I'm powerless and my life is unmanageable.'

But it doesn't end there. Jesus doesn't show the disciples they're inadequate because he wants them to feel bad. He shows them they're inadequate because he wants to *use* them in extraordinary ways. His power is made perfect in weakness. And so Andrew comes to Jesus and says, 'Here's a little boy with 5 barley cakes and a couple sardines.' And out of this *poverty* Jesus feeds the 5,000. No, Jesus doesn't call us to give Him *great* things. But He does call us to give him what we have.

I once read an account by Mabel Shaw, a missionary in Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She writes of how one day, after visiting a leper colony, the lepers told her that a lion was prowling around the village. She then writes: "I was about to leave, when out came the old leper head man. He held a spear between the stumps that once were hands, and he went hobbling along the path in front of me. I called to him, and he looked around.

"Where are you going [I asked]?"

"I am going to escort you to the Merebishi village [he said], you cannot go alone with lions about."

I smiled at him. "But on my bicycle I'll be there in a minute."

He would not have it. I looked at him, a feeble old man, handless, feet half eaten, his whole body covered with marks of disease, and his face most pitiful. I said to him bantering... "Now what could you do if a lion came?"

He drew himself up, and with a quiet dignity said, “Have I not a life to give?”  
I was silent, seeing a Cross.

My friends, do you have a life to give? What is your bread and fish? What time, treasure, and talents do you have? And I don’t care where you are! If you’re watching this in a nursing home, what do you have to give? You can at least pray, which may the greatest gift of all.

I’ve noticed recently in this pandemic, a lot of Christians seem to be on autopilot. We’re praying less, not reading our Bibles, etc. My friends, if there were ever a time to get engaged, *this is it*. If there were ever a time to fast and pray fervently, to give sacrificially, to work on our marriages and families, this is it. We’re living through one of the defining crises of our world. If there were ever a time to pursue God, to press into our faith, this is it.

When I played highschool sports we had a phrase, ‘Leave it all on the field.’ That is, hold nothing back. So at the end of the game you’d have no regrets. And the same holds true for us. Life is short, it’s not a dress rehearsal, so leave it all on the field. Like that little boy, give Jesus your all. As Christina Rossetti wrote, ‘What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb. If I were a Wise Man I would do my part. Yet what can I give Him, Give Him my heart.’

And so we can see the character of the king – He loves us. And we see the currency of the kingdom – weakness surrendered to God. Finally, and in closing, the last thing we see is cost of the crown.

The rest of our chapter is very strange. After feeding the 5,000, the people try to make Jesus king by force. And Jesus then gives them one of his greatest teachings. He says, ‘*I am the bread of life... if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*’

And the crowds are horrified. 5,000 men walk away. Because they don’t want a king like this. And if we’re honest, we don’t want a king like this either. Why? Because this is too personal and too costly.

You see, bread is an image of life and sustenance. In the first century most people didn’t eat meat and bread was the staple. But here’s the key. Jesus doesn’t say, ‘I’ll give you bread.’ They were fine with that, as we see in the feeding.

But, no, he says, ‘*I am the bread.*’ I’m not the provider of bread, I’m the bread itself. And the thing about bread is for bread to give life, the grain must die and the bread must be broken. By saying ‘I’m the bread,’ Jesus is saying, ‘I’m the king who will be broken for my people.’

And of course we see this on the cross. The crown of thorns. The king of the Jews. This is my body, broken for you.

And the truth is, you and I don’t want a king like this. We don’t want to be indebted to anyone like this. We want a conqueror, or a personal assistant. We don’t want a Savior. To paraphrase Batman, Jesus is not the king we wanted, but He’s the king we needed.

His is the blood which washes us clean, his is the body that gives us life. And when we humble ourselves, and give him our sins, and embrace his sacrificial love, then we experience a forgiveness, a freedom, a peace, a glory and a quality of life we have never known before.

Today, as we approach the King’s table, may we know the heights and depths of his love, may we receive His life, broken for us. And may we give him what we have...because he’s given everything for us. To King Jesus be the glory, now and forever. Amen.