

“Jesus – Bread of Life”

If our Gospel Lectionary Reading seems fairly familiar, then rest assured, you are correct. It was part of a longer Scripture, which was used on World Communion Sunday, the First Sunday of October, last year. Since it was our Text for World Communion Sunday, the sermon focused on the Reading’s importance related to the sacrament of Holy Communion and the nature of the Community of Believers, the Church. Although we celebrate the sacrament again this morning, instead of focusing on the Scripture’s role in the origination of this sacred meal, **today’s sermon centers on why the Text includes the report of a confrontation between Jesus and the crowd, those who had sought after him following his feeding more than 5,000 men plus women and children.**

Unfortunately, the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, show no knowledge of this conflict. As I frequently mentioned during the sermon series on the Gospel of John, last school year, the Gospel of John has been documented to be much more accurate on historical and geographical descriptions than the Synoptic Gospels. My explanation has been and continues to be, the reason for the greater accuracy is because the source of the information in the Gospel of John came from an actual I witness, while the Synoptic Gospels depend on second hand or more distant testimonies. **Today’s Lectionary Gospel Reading provides a more detailed report of the aftermath from the Feeding of the 5,000 because it originated from a follower of Jesus, who was there when the event occurred. He was either the gospel author or a firsthand source for the writer of the Gospel of John.**

The initial evidence of the confrontation between Jesus and a large segment of the 5,000+ crowd at the Feeding is found toward the conclusion of the story about that miraculous event. Only the Gospel of John reported a significant portion of the crowd understood Jesus’ feeding of them was a precursor to the Messianic Feast. We know this because of what the crowd said in **John 6:14, “When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, ‘Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!’”** In addition to revealing this understanding of the meaning of the Feeding of the 5,000, the Gospel of John has a stunningly different conclusion to the report about the event than what Matthew and Mark stated. Those gospels claim Jesus sent the Twelve ahead in a boat and then he dismissed the crowd and went up a hill to pray. However, it is revealed in **John 6:15, “When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.”**

Jesus refused to allow the crowd’s desire to be gratified through him being made the Warrior King because they would have high jacked him from his true purpose and calling. The people gave into their desire – their temptation to try to force God’s Messiah to miraculously defeat the Roman Empire! Jesus intentionally evaded the notice of the people, as he hurried away from those, who wanted to impose their will upon him!

Another major difference between the accounts of the Gospel of John and those two Synoptic Gospels was their claim, Jesus ordered his original disciples to go ahead of him across the lake. The Gospel of John indicates the disciples, themselves, decided to take a boat across the lake. Jesus eluded them, as he had the demanding crowd. The disciples, evidently, also misunderstood the nature of Jesus’ purpose. They were clueless as to why Jesus hid from the crowd. Interestingly enough, Luke, who had a copy of Mark, did not follow Mark’s lead. Luke made no mention of the disciples going in a boat without Jesus. **Did he choose to exclude Mark’s claim because Luke knew of other information, which was in conflict with Mark’s account?**

In the meantime, Mark and Matthew agreed with the Gospel of John’s report that Jesus walked on the lake, caught up with his disciples, and had the extraordinary encounter with Peter on the water. Luke does not report this miraculous event. Again, I suspect Luke knew of competing and conflicting reports about that experience. Specifically, the two other Synoptic Gospels claim Jesus sent the disciples ahead in the boat to go to Bethsaida, although they actually went to Gennesaret, while the Gospel of John indicated they arrived at Capernaum – the town where Jesus lived.

Although Mark and Matthew did not indicate those fed among the 5,000+ had a confrontation with Jesus or misunderstood what the miracle meant, they provided an important insight into the disciples’ failure to understand the situation. After Jesus joined his disciples in their boat, **Mark disclosed in 6:51b-52, “The disciples were completely amazed, because they had not understood the real meaning of the feeding of the five thousand; their minds could not grasp it.”**

The Gospel of John explained some in the crowd went looking for Jesus soon after his disappearance following his feeding of the 5,000+. They knew he did not get in the boat with his disciples and was nowhere to be found, so they got into boats and headed to Capernaum. I suspect they were aware Jesus lived in Capernaum. When they arrived there, those, who were chasing after Jesus, wanted him to explain how and when he arrived.

As many in the crowd of the 5,000+, had sought to force Jesus to be their Warrior King, so those, who had chased after Jesus to Capernaum, also had an agenda they wanted to impose on him. The Gospel of John reported this in **verse 26, “Jesus answered, ‘I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you**

understood my miracles.” Jesus knew they wanted him to perpetually be their miracle bread provider! Jesus counseled them in verse 27, **“Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put His mark of approval on him.”**

Now, those words of Jesus might sound like he was encouraging them to eat the food he would give them, so they would have eternal life. However, the literal meaning of the Greek from the Gospel of John, means Jesus would give food, which lasts to their eternal relationship with God, instead of spoiling, as manna did when the Israelites led by Moses tried to keep it longer than the Almighty allowed.

Momentarily, the crowd sought Jesus’ additional counsel and asked him in **verse 28, “What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?”** Jesus pointed to his purpose and told them in **verse 29, “What God wants you to do is to believe in the one He sent.”** Jesus was not talking about them merely thinking he was sent by God – not to just have a cognitive activity. **He was talking about the people putting their trust in him and God, and then, depending on them for the very nature of their lives!**

As Jesus earlier indicated, they were not chasing after him to live the New Faith Relationship with God through himself. They wanted to control him – to get him to fulfill their desires – especially that of filling their bellies. So they demanded he perform for them and they even set out a test for Jesus, which would also give them full bellies. **In verse 30 the crowd asked and exclaimed, “What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?”** They thought they could teach Jesus how to accommodate their desires by saying in **verse 31, “Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”**

Jesus exposed their shallow understanding of what God had done for the Israelites with Moses and said in **verses 32-33, “I am telling you the truth, what Moses gave you was not the Bread from Heaven; it is my Father Who gives you the Real Bread from Heaven. For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”** It may be helpful to remember Chapter 1 of the Gospel of John refers to Jesus as the pre-existing “Word” or “Logos” through whom God creates all things, gives light, and Life! So, God’s Son, Jesus the Christ, came to bring Life again! It is not just the life after the death of our earthly bodies. Instead, God’s Chosen One brings Life – the Life of those, who belong to God’s People – belong to the Almighty’s Kingdom – belong to our Divine Parent’s New Faith Relationship with us – with All People! **God gave us the Real Bread of Heaven – the Bread of Life to demonstrate God’s Agape Love for us has already forgiven us and reconciled us with our Divine Parent!**

The self-centered crowd, which had chased Jesus to Capernaum to demand more bread – more miracles, responded to Jesus’ revelation about his identity by demonstrating they were still thinking in terms of the bread_or food which spoils. **In verse 34 they asked Jesus, “Sir, give us this bread always.”**

In verse 35, Jesus declared to the crowd, “I am the Bread of Life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus was speaking metaphorically – talking about living out the New Faith Relationship with God through himself – not about a special food and drink! **In the remaining verses of Chapter 6, Jesus called the crowd and especially his disciples to be committed to him being the glue between ourselves and God – to be the Bread of Life.**

The crowd was a lost cause – they could not move from selfishly wanting their bellies to be full. The reality for Jesus was, he knew his disciples were no better off than that crowd in their failure to be open to his true purpose and identity. So, Jesus made an outlandish sounding demand, first of the crowd but really to his disciples or followers. **Jesus declared in verses 49-51, “Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. But the Bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this Bread, he will live forever. The Bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.”**

The crowd responded with great anger and they left Jesus. Although his disciples still did not truly understand Jesus’ metaphor, they responded to Jesus’ demand that they eat his body and drink his blood with confusion and a commitment to remain with Jesus. I believe it was following this confrontation between Jesus, the crowd from the 5,000+, and his disciples that began his putting his demands into practice during his meals with his disciples. Yes, the other books in the New Testament, evidently, only knew of this ritual of commitment to Jesus as part of his Last Supper with his disciples, although the Gospel of Luke refers to two of Jesus’ followers recognizing the Risen Jesus through his breaking of the bread.

As we join in this sacrament of the Bread and Cup representing Jesus’ ultimate manifestation of God’s Agape Love for humanity and the world, we reaffirm our commitment to be his true disciples – of our living out the New Faith Relationship with God and the Only Son – the Source of Life – the Bread of Life. Let’s recommit ourselves to the Life Jesus came to bring us in our Relationship with him and our Divine Parent. Amen.