**Jesus Withdrew - Again**

**John 6:1-15**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Isn’t it cool? Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men (plus women and children)! What a great miracle, five barley loaves and two small fish provided a meal for all those people. Top that off with the fact that when they were done, they picked up twelve baskets of leftover fragments.

Wouldn’t you have loved to have been there to see that great miracle? Imagine having been able to see Jesus heal all those He healed. To see Him make the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, and to see Him cast out demons. Finally, to be there as he fed all those people with so little? How great would that have been?

The people that day made the right connections, they realized who it was that had performed the miracle that day, seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy made through Moses in Deuteronomy. They got it right, and they even expressed it correctly, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

But, while they knew the prophecy and correctly connected it to Jesus as the Christ, they missed the point. They wanted to make Jesus king so that He would take care of them. They wanted Him to provide food for them, to make sure there was no shortage of toilet paper or hand sanitizer. Jesus knew what would happen. This is not some new story, simply a repeat of history in a slightly different way. What is happening is simply what He had done already in the past.

Jesus was the bread that came down from heaven and fed their forefathers when they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. God fed them manna and quail, but they complained that they loathed that worthless food and wanted leeks. He had freed them from their slavery in Egypt. Instead of enjoying their newfound freedom, they complained about it. They said that they would rather be back in bondage to Egypt than free from slavery and in the wilderness eating quail and manna, and having water to drink.

Jesus had gone off to be alone with His disciples. He *went away to the* ***other side of the Sea of Tiberius.*** He was practicing social distancing to spend time in meditation on the Word of God and in prayer – alone with His disciples. What a wonderful opportunity this forced social distancing has given us, that we too might be freed to spend time in the Scriptures and prayer – alone or with our closest family members.

Back to Jesus… A large crowd, a fickle crowd *was following Him.* Why? Because they had seen the signs! They wanted more of the same. The crowds saw the miracles, now they wanted Jesus to be king and provide them with food. They were going to force Him to be their king. They wanted Him to do all these things for Him – feed them so they did not have to work at it, heal them when sick.

But it would not last. Even as their forefather had so, so they too would have tired of Him doing so pretty quick. How many meals would you tolerate if it was always barley bread and fish – or manna and quail. Jesus therefore withdrew – ***AGAIN*** – to the mountain by Himself. Jesus had come for a greater purpose.

This miracle points forward to what is coming. In fact, on the very next day, a little further in this chapter of John’s gospel, they come to find Jesus again. When they come upon Him, He says to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." (vv. 26-27) "I am the bread of life." (vs. 35) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. 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." (vs. 51) "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in Him. (vv. 53-56)

Do you know what happens then? After speaking these words to them, many no longer followed Him. When He took care of their physical needs for life in this world… when He fed them and healed them… they were happy to follow Him. But when Jesus talks of spiritual and eternal matters. When Jesus proclaims to them the greater gifts He desires to give them… that was offensive.Just give us health and food, provide for our physical, earthly cares, and we will be happy.

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it. You do not mind the spiritual stuff on your terms – once a week is more than enough, and it better not be more than an hour. Give me the right car, the proper house, the correct boat, but do not call me a sinner in need of forgiveness.

But now there is coronavirus. Now there is social distancing. Now there is the possibility that, yes, some will die. In fact, many are. Some are in stark terror, afraid that they will lose their financial wherewithal, that if this goes much longer they will be broke, that the market will crash, that…

How can pastor talk about spiritual and eternal things at a time like this?

How often do we want God to deal with us on our terms? We know exactly what we need, why doesn’t God see it? Why doesn’t God just take care of us as we’d like to be taken care of? After all, don’t you think in the same manner that I think? God are you paying attention, it is pretty simple, I live in my body, this is my life, I should know what I need, shouldn’t I? Why can’t you just do what I would like you to do for me?”

In our text, Jesus exerts His Divine compassion upon the disciples and upon the multitude by feeding them both physically and spiritually. Our Lord sees into the hearts of all mankind; He looks beyond the desires of the flesh and meets your innermost need. It is Christ Himself who states in John 6 that He is the Bread of Life. It is Christ who bears witness of Himself to the woman at the well and tells her that He is Living Water. He invites us to eat of His body and to drink of His blood for the forgiveness of sins. Our Lord implores all of mankind to come to Him, for in Him we have rest for our souls. Believe in Jesus and you will have the prosperity of eternal life in heaven.

Herein lies the problem. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you and I are often victims of our own hopelessness. We all have needs and desires. All too often our perceived needs, which are really nothing more than selfish desires, do not jive with our true need. That true need is for forgiveness and reconciliation to our creator God – for life everlasting – for that day that will dawn upon us from on high when our mortal bodies will be raised and transformed to be like His glorious body. This life is passing away, but He is even now, in this life, preparing us for the life to come.

So Jesus withdrew – again – by Himself. In our text, it was to the mountain to be alone. His task was to be completed alone – by Himself. Jesus withdrew by Himself to be the sacrifice that paid for our greatest need. He withdrew by Himself, for only He could be the atoning sacrifice for our sin. His was a burden that only He could carry. His was the price that only He could pay. His was something that only He could do, and yet there was that temptation to stay and keep the people happy.

Yes, there was the temptation to stay and give the people what they wanted, “If you are the Son of God, make these stones into bread.” Wouldn’t doing that have been much easier than, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me… I thirst… into your hands I commit My Spirit”?

Jesus does take care of all our physical needs. He is God who provides for all our physical needs. Please note that Jesus did not give them a five course meal complete with, appetizer, soup, salad, entrée, dessert, and a glass of wine. He provided the pauper’s feast – fish and bread. In that meal, all were fed – AND – satisfied.

His preaching and teaching fed their souls unto life everlasting. He preached as He always did, as He instructed His disciples to preach in their day, and His pastors to preach even today – repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He fed not only their bodies for life in this mortal frame, but He fed them so that they might have life eternal – body and soul. He fed the complete person.

Why are you here today? You come today for what purpose? For your need? What is your need? The greatest need of humanity goes deeper than any need for physical food can satisfy. You can have good health, great wealth, bread and fish even without Jesus. Martin Luther, in explaining the Lord's prayer says, "God gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all the wicked". All of the things of this earthly life you can have without Jesus. Yes, you heard me correctly – all the things of this earthly life you can have ***without*** Jesus.

But the one thing that you need, and the one thing that you can have only through faith in Christ, is the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That, my dear friends, is your greatest need! That, only Jesus can provide.

On that mountain, Jesus filled their bellies from five barely loaves and two small fish – thousands were filled. The greater miracle is that they believed He was the One God had promised to send.

Jesus fills you today, He speaks and miracles happen. Bread and wine are His body and blood. God deigns to feed you. He is the One come into the world to save you, to grant unto you salvation, to feed and nourish you in body and soul unto life everlasting. Amen.