

Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead New York
Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Proper 12B– July 25, 2021

I Kings 4:42-44

Ephesians 3:14-21

Psalm 145:10-18

John 6:1-21

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN!

You may wonder why we hear the account of Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fishes two weeks in a row. Last week, when we considered Mark's telling of the miracle, we heard that it was because of Jesus' compassion for the people, who were like sheep without a shepherd, that he provided the meal with which they were fed out in the deserted place in which he had been teaching and healing them all day.

Today, it is John's account that we hear, with some significant distinctions that give us an entirely different picture of Jesus' relationship to both his disciples and the crowds of people who followed them.

Mark introduces the idea of feeding the crowd when it has already become late in the day, and the disciples suggest that Jesus send the people to the surrounding villages to buy something to eat. John tells us that Jesus raises the topic, asking Philip where they are to buy bread for the people to eat (6:5). But "[h]e said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do." (6:6.) This would be a sign of the fullness of God's reign on earth as well as in heaven.

John's Jesus is aware that the Passover is near (6:4), and he knows that a boy in the crowd has five barley loaves and two dried fish (6:9). After Jesus gives thanks for this small offering (6:11), he distributes the food himself to the assembled people, and it becomes the feast that satisfies thousands and leaves twelve baskets of left-over pieces of barley loaf and fish. (6:13).

This sign is John's telling of the institution of the eucharist. In the fourth Gospel, although Jesus shares a last meal with his closest disciples just before the crucifixion, it is when he begins it by washing their feet and teaches them about the commandment that they love one another; that they conduct themselves as servant leaders. (13:3-17.) There is no institution of Holy Communion at this meal.

But, you may ask, where is the wine at the outdoor meal? And where are the words of institution? It's true that the approach is different. But note that in John's account of the feeding, Jesus gives thanks for the food and then he himself distributes it to everyone present (6:11). It is as if he is saying to each person as he hands him or her bread, "this is my body, given for you."

And then there is Jesus' attention to the broken pieces left over: "when they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." (6:12.)

The Passover is near – the time when Jesus will be arrested, tortured and crucified. Here, in the countryside, he, who will call himself "the bread of life," (6:35) has distributed bread that has been broken into fragments and consumed by his followers. And after God has satisfied the thousands of people gathered, there are still twelve baskets left, raising the historically biblical number of wholeness, from the number of the Old Testament tribes of Israel, to that of the inner circle of disciples.

Before Jesus' intervention in the scene near the mountain, there is only a simple lunch to feed five thousand people: it is a scene of need, scarcity, lack of resources and poverty. But then, after he gives thanks and distributes the meal, there is satiety, abundance, fullness, and baskets of food left over.

So what will God do with these broken pieces? We aren't told, but we do know that nothing should be lost. God has use for every fragment in our lives and it is through that use that we experience the abundance of God's love of us and provision for our lives.

After the crucifixion, the broken body of Jesus was preserved, cared for and placed in a tomb by followers (19:28-42), so that nothing should be lost; so that the resurrection that would follow in three days, might take place.

This is what Jesus is teaching us: that the brokenness of Jesus is like the brokenness of our lives. We experience the death of our beloved, through COVID and otherwise; we may find that relationships have not survived the strain of living with the pandemic. We stand in the midst of brokenness, with the resurrected Jesus offering himself to us as we gather, "this is my body, broken for you." And we take it, and make it part of ourselves, and become the Body of Christ in the world,

transformed by the love of God and his grace.

We are the servant leaders sent into the world to share the loving acceptance of our God. We carry on the tradition of wholeness, bringing the food that the world needs, whether it is through Lutheran Disaster Response for the people being starved as a weapon of war in Yemen, for those who have survived the floods in Europe and China, or through the New Life Center of Long Island, our hungry neighbors who receive bags of groceries.

We are the servant leaders who visit friends and relatives whose loved ones have died, bringing the presence of Christ and the promise of the resurrection to them, to provide a reason to hope.

We are the Body of Christ, living now in the twenty-first century, communicating to our elected leaders that justice is to prevail in our land. We seek justice for unarmed people, especially those who are Black and Brown, when they are confronted with the power and angry might of the police. We seek justice for the hundreds of thousands of people who have been riven from their generational homes by disasters, poverty, and the violence of gangs that corrupt governments cannot relieve or stop.

We are the Body of Christ who insist that real, practical steps be taken by individuals and by the governments in control of the nations of the earth, to stop and reverse the effects of climate change, global warming, the degradation of our natural world, before it is completely destroyed.

We are the Body of Christ who take time to worship, to be in intimate relationship with God, through Holy Spirit, to receive the power that enabled Jesus to walk on water in order to reach the disciples who were headed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee.

God's work, using the broken pieces of human life, is in our hands, to fashion full, abundant and joyful existence for the people of God in every corner of the world. Will we rise to the need? Will we say "yes" to God's call?

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit, C: Amen