

Worship Service for July 25th: 9th Sunday after Pentecost

- **Old Testament:** 2 Kings 4:42-44
- **New Testament:** John 6:1-21
- **Psalms:** Psalm 14

Announcements:

- We are celebrating the 100th birthday anniversary of Mabel Zinck

Sermon Title: Looking Beyond The Sign!

For some weeks now our lectionary readings have been from the gospel of Mark. This week we have switched to the gospel of John and although these writers tell similar stories about Jesus, they all have different purposes, language and writing style. In John 20:30-31, he tells us his purpose of writing and says, *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”* John’s writing is more personal as he addresses his readers directly and his purpose is for his readers to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God and also have life in his name.

John wrote his gospel towards the end of the first century and towards the end of his life. His gospel was written at a time when the early Christians were under extreme persecutions from the Romans. Although his audience were Christians, they didn’t have any first-hand experience of Jesus and their Christian faith was being threatened by too much persecution. These people needed to know more, hear more, and see more about Jesus. They needed to be embedded in Jesus, to abide in Him so that they would be able to withstand and resist the fear, the pain, and the tortures they were experiencing from the Roman soldiers. When John talks about miracles, he refers to them as “signs” that lead to revelations of Jesus as the true Messiah, or the true bread, the bread of life as he tells us when we read further in chapter 6.

John presents to us a Messiah who goes around teaching large crowds in public places and performing great signs which attracts a lot of attention and causes people to ask questions about who Jesus really is. An example of which we see in our passage today where Jesus feeds five thousand people. When John presents to us the miracles or signs that Jesus performs, it is not with the intention for us to

focus on the signs but to look past them to the performer of the sign and who he truly is.

He takes time to give us a precise location of where this happened so that we can know for a fact that it is a true story. Jesus asks Philip where he thinks they could buy bread because the location where they found themselves was around Bethsaida and Philip was from there and was familiar with their surroundings. Yet we are told that Jesus was only testing Philip because he already knew what he would do.

This reminds me of the interaction the Lord had with the prophet Ezekiel, where He took the prophet to a valley of dry bones and asked him whether those bones could live again. Ezekiel wisely answered that the Lord alone knew the answer to that question. This was the kind of response that Jesus was expecting from Philip. Philip was a student under the Rabbi, under the Master and Jesus wanted to know if he was learning anything at all. We see that Philip was not the only person who wasn't learning because the crowds even though they followed Jesus because of the miracles or signs he performed, still didn't consider him as the Messiah and even tried to make Him king.

The apostle John was writing to his audience and appealing to them to see the bigger picture, because it was only then that they would be able to keep enduring the fear, the pain and torture that they were receiving or else they would surrender to pressure. If we read further in John 6:60-70, we will notice that some of Jesus' disciples deserted Him, but not the Twelve. They did so because Jesus had declared Himself as the bread of life and that if they eat His flesh and drink His blood, they will have eternal life.

John is therefore informing his audience that Jesus is the One sent down from heaven to earth to give us repentance, salvation and eternal life. That as the Bread of Life, Jesus is able to take care of their needs both physical and spiritual. He is telling them that Jesus cares for them as he cared for the crowd and decided to provide them the food they needed. He is encouraging his audience to come with the little they faith they have, and he will cause their faith to multiply and increase.

We are like John's audience in that we didn't see Jesus and we weren't Jews before becoming Christians. We might not be going through the kind of persecution, fear,

and pain that they were going through, but we have our fair share of challenges. We have been plagued with different kinds of sickness and diseases especially cancer which is rapidly taking away the lives of our loved ones no matter the age. We have other challenges and to crown it all we have been going through a pandemic for more than a year now. Many people have not been able to see their families as they would have loved to, people have lost loved ones and because of Covid restrictions their friends and family couldn't be there beside them. Churches are closing down daily, and we are living in uncertainty. Some of us are struggling with how we can serve God because the devil has lied to us that we don't have what it takes. We have been left to deal with our challenges by ourselves or so it seems.

It is in these times that we hear lots of voices; external voices of those discouraging us from serving God because He doesn't seem to be interested in what we are going through or the devil's lies echoing in our minds. If there is any time that we need to truly know who Jesus is to us, it is now. If there is any time that we need to look passed the miracles to the true bread, the bread of life, it is now. If there is any time that we need to get past our doubts and fears like Philip and have faith in Jesus our Saviour and Messiah, it is now. There might be things we have to learn in order to see Jesus as the Messiah; there might be others we have to unlearn in order to see Him as our Lord and Saviour; as the Bread of life.

It is time for us to make up our minds to believe the truth about who Jesus is no matter what we are going through. To continue to look onto Jesus because He is the author and the finisher of our faith and to pray for those who were among us and have left the faith because of their fears, pains, and persecutions. For us to achieve this, we need to spend time with God, in prayer, retreats, studying and meditating on the Word of God and telling others about Jesus. The more we minister to others, the more we will be ministered to.

In the same way that John spoke to his audience, he is speaking to us today, as individuals, as families and as a church. John's passage is inviting us to come to the feet of Jesus with the little we have for him to multiply it. He is calling on us to come and receive true bread, the kind that will make us never to go hungry again. He is calling on us to come and receive the life that is eternal. He is calling on us to believe, truly believe in him not just as a miracle worker but as the Son of God who came down to give us eternal life.

I pray that God will open our eyes and our hearts to experience powerful encounters with Him, even as I leave us with this prayer from Ephesians 3:14-21, *I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Prayer

Loving God, You are our Creator and Sustainer. When You open Your hand, You satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing. And so we look to You whenever we are in need, trusting in Your love and Your abundant goodness.

Gracious God, there is a lot of emptiness in our midst. As You once fed the hungry crowds with five loaves and two small fish, we ask that You would again fill those who are empty this day. Pour out Your Spirit on all who hunger and thirst.

We pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty. We think of the people around the world who are facing critical food shortages; who are suffering the effects of malnutrition and starvation; and watching helplessly as loved ones die. Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand. Pour out Your Spirit, so that they may be filled.

We pray for those who are emotionally empty— who are lonely and long for companionship and love, who are caught in the grip of depression, or overwhelmed with grief. Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand. Pour out Your Spirit, so that they may be filled.

We pray for those who are spiritually empty— who are troubled, but don't know where to turn; who long for purpose and meaning, but don't know where to look; who need You, but do not yet know You. Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand. Pour out Your Spirit, so that they may be filled.

God, we praise You for Your abundant gifts in our lives. Pour out Your Spirit on us as well. Fill us with Your compassion and love, so that we would willingly share some of our abundance with those who have need. Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand. Pour out Your Spirit, so that we may be filled. We pray in the name and the Words of Jesus Christ, who came so that all of humanity might come to know the abundant life that comes from You. As we pray the Lord's prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. And may God strengthen you in your inner beings. May Christ Jesus dwell in your hearts through faith and may the Holy Spirit plant your roots deeply in the abundant richness of God's love. Amen.