

Introduction

Today is the first of five Sundays with gospel readings from John 6, the first four of which focus on Jesus as bread of life. Today Jesus feeds thousands of people with five loaves and two fish. What we have, what we bring to Jesus' table, seems like it is not nearly enough to meet all the needs we see around us. But it is not the adequacy of our supplies or our skills that finally makes the difference: it is the power of Jesus working in the littlest and least to transform this world into the world God desires, a world where all the hungry are satisfied.

Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, you have placed within the hearts of all your children a longing for your word and a hunger for your truth. Grant that we may know your Son to be the true bread of heaven and share this bread with all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 2 Samuel 11:1-15

King David takes Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, then eventually has her husband murdered. The king, who should be at the battle but stays home, is contrasted in this story with the loyal and upright soldier Uriah.

¹In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

²It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

⁶So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" ¹¹Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and

to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.”¹² Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day,¹³ David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.”

Psalm 14

¹Fools say in their hearts, “There | is no God.”

They are corrupt, every deed is vile; there is no one who does | any good.

**²The LORD looks down from heaven up- | on us all,
to see if there is anyone who is wise, who seeks | after God.**

³They have all proved faithless; all alike | have turned bad;
there is none who does good; | no, not one.

**⁴Have they no knowledge, all those | evildoers
who eat up my people like bread and do not call up- | on the LORD?**

⁵See how they trem- | ble with fear,
because God is in the company | of the righteous.

**⁶Your aim is to confound the plans of | the afflicted,
but the LORD| is their refuge.**

⁷Oh, that Israel’s deliverance would come | out of Zion!

When the LORD restores the fortunes of the people, Jacob will rejoice and Israel | will be glad.

Second Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

We have been rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, which surpasses all human knowledge. Because Christ dwells in our hearts, our lives are continuously strengthened and empowered by the ongoing presence of the Spirit.

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so

that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading: John 6:1-21

In John's gospel, the miracles of Jesus are called "signs," because they reveal the true character of God. As such, they remain within the mystery of God and cannot be brought under human control.

¹Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Prayers of Intercession

Rooted in Christ and sustained by the Spirit, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation, saying “Hear us, O God,” and responding, “Your mercy is great.”

A brief silence.

We pray for the church. Bless the ministries of our neighboring congregations (*especially*). Empower churches throughout the world and encourage missionaries who accompany global neighbors. Kindle in us a spirit of collaboration, that all people may know your loving works. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

We pray for creation. Send rain to lands experiencing drought and come to the aid of those enduring sweltering heat. Nurture wheat and barley crops grown for the nourishment of your people and conserve aquatic habitats and fish populations. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

We pray for those who govern. Cast out arrogance, selfishness, and corruption and instruct those who lead to practice compassion and humility. Inspire them with a vision of the common good and a commitment to ensure that all who hunger are fed. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

We pray for those bowed down by heavy burdens: those who are unemployed or underemployed, those unable to find affordable housing, and those without health insurance. Console those who grieve and hear the cries of those who call to you for healing (*especially those we name now, either silently on our hearts, or aloud... [pause]*). Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

We pray for this assembly. Deepen our resolve to use what we have to serve those in need. When we worry that we do not have enough resources for ministry, assure us of your abundance. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

We give thanks for those who have died. As you sustained them through all their days, so dwell in our hearts, that we may have the power to comprehend, with (*the apostle James, name/s, and*) all the saints, the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

We lift these and all our prayers to you, O God, confident in the promise of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost...

Rollin' in the Dough—and Fishes

In recent years many books have been printed that focus on baking vast assortments of breads—from rye to pumpernickel, French to Italian. Today, however, we encounter a bread that points to both a deeper longing, physically and spiritually, and an even more fulfilling outcome than the tastiest assortment of baked bread. This abundance of bread satisfies hunger, transforms lives, and ushers in a new vision of the holy in community. Recognizing the power of action, John calls to mind the ways prophets fed and nourished the people, and then he multiplies this in the person and action of Jesus. Jesus uses earthly gifts to provide for the gathered community—the gospel's vision of Jesus' life and God's abundance in creation. Second Kings and John allow our congregations to wonder with the faithful servants and disciples how God will provide. We are invited into a conversation that might start by reflecting on a sentence written by the late United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld: "Each morning we must hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry, and give back." The scriptures today open a door for us to think about how individuals and communities are nourished and sustained by God, and also imagine how we become vessels of the holy who are now opened to the call of service. How might ordinary gifts (and ordinary people) become the ways God's love and mercy are multiplied in sustenance for neighbor, community, and world? Through our questions, our acts of giving, and our proclamation of the works of God in Christ Jesus, we are invited to experience what it means to be rooted in God's sustaining love and to proclaim this God who invites us into the unimaginable vision of abundance.

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