

Lent 4B  
Lætare Sunday 2018  
Rev. Doug Floyd  
John 6:1-15

On this fourth Sunday of Lent, we rejoice and celebrate that the feast of Resurrection is coming soon. Our Gospel story highlights the promise that is coming. We learn from John 6:4 that the feast of Pentecost is at hand. Then in John 6:5, we read that a Jesus lifts up his eyes and sees a large crowd coming toward him on the mountain. It appears that this crowd is made up of people who are traveling to the feast of Pentecost. They've heard story of this miracle worker and most likely want to see him up close. John estimates the crowd at 5,000, which probably means that the entire crowds is closer to 20,000.

Jesus is sitting on the mountain with his disciples. He is probably teaching them. They could be discussing his recent comments recorded in John 5 where Jesus says that he does only what he sees the Father doing. His words challenge the Jews and even the disciples. Such as, "an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup>For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." (Jn 5:26).

As Jesus is talking with his disciples, he looks up sees thousands of people coming up the mountain. I would guess with that many people they were pretty noisy as well. As I think about this through my selfish eyes, I think how frustrated it would be to be in the midst of a private discussion when I am continuously being interrupted by people who want to see a sign. In the late 80s, I led a youth group of mostly rough kids who didn't usually attend on Sunday mornings. They had a special place in my heart, so it was easy for me to show them mercy. Sometimes I struggled with the church kids. One fairly religious boy was always trying to tell me about his latest revelation and I really struggled to stop what I was doing and pay attention to him.

Years later, he reached out to me and told me how much youth group had meant to him. It broke my heart because I was not fully present to him and his needs. Yet God in his grace was present. The boy came from a single parent home and I'm sure he was probably lonely and longing for a father figure. He came to mind as I was reading about Jesus seeing the crowds coming. He was present to them just as he was present to the disciples.

Here we begin to see a glimpse of the Father's goodness and grace manifested in Jesus. Just as he said in John 5, "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." (Jn 5:19). What was the Father doing, he was, he is present to the needs of his children. He is present in our selfishness, our brokenness, our self-righteousness. He is present to us and responds directly to our true needs.

Jesus looks up and sees the crowd, and immediately begins to address their real need for food. He invites the disciples around him into this situation. Turning to Philip he says, "Where are we

to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” (Jn 6:5). This is an opportunity to test Philip, to challenge him to reflect, to respond, to see what God will do. Philip is only aware of his lack. We don’t have enough money to buy bread. The Lord often invites us into ministry and situations where we are aware of our lack. Our first response is often, “Lord I don’t know what to do. I don’t think I’m the one to help.” Then Andrew walks up with almost nothing: five barley loaves and two fish. In the presence of 20,000 people this is like throwing a glass of water on a raging forest fire.

Jesus invites the people to sit down. He takes the meager offering and offers a simple prayer of thanksgiving and then distributes the food. We don’t see the miracle. We’re simply told that everyone ate their fill. The miracle happens out of sight and yet it happens. The meager offerings have become an abundant feast with plenty of leftovers. This simple story gives us a fresh glimpse of God’s abundance, extravagance in blessing his people, in caring for the saints and the sinners.

He has blessed us with the surprise of existence, with a beautiful world, with tastebuds, with music, with colors, with family, and much more. The miracle of His provision and sustaining grace is so often hidden from our eyes like the miracle of the multiplying of the loaves and fish. But we still benefit from his overwhelming goodness every second of our lives.

The people respond with excitement because this sign suggests that he is the prophet that Moses said was to come. They are ready to make him king. Think of the uproar. Five thousand men shooting and coming toward him to make him king. But he withdraws to the mountain by himself. He knew what was in their hearts. He knew that believed he was king. He knew they were excited. He also knew that they were not actually prepared to receive him as king. There is a big difference between making him king and submitting to him as king.

The fickle human heart so easily want to make God into our image and into the image of what or who we need in this moment. We might need a fire-breathing God to consume our enemies. We might need a healing God to take away our pain. We might need a judge to vindicate us before our coworkers or even or family. But that is not the way to obedience, the way of discipleship, the way of the cross. He has come to meet all our needs, but he will lead us in a way that heals and transforms us. He will leads us as the true sovereign of the universe. No one can make him king and no one can step outside of his rule.

The Father exalts him above every name and at the name of Jesus we must kneel and confess him as Lord.

How might the crowds have responded to the miracle of the food? Repentance. Adoration. In Luke 5, Jesus tells Peter to put the boat out in the deep for a great catch. Peter thinks of their lack, “Master, we’ve already been toiling all night!” When they obey, they catch so many fish that their nets out breaking. Peter kneels down before Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (Lk 5:8).

The goodness of God provokes humility, repentance, worship, and thanksgiving. This makes me think about the power of beauty. Beauty can provoke longing, tears, joy, and all sorts of emotional and physical responses long before we have time to think about it. We don't have eyes for beauty because it is so commonplace. So overlook the glory of the world and the glory of the people around us on a daily basis.

We live in a world where people tend to notice their lack. Like Philip's response, we tend to think about how little time we have, how little resources we have, how little our blessings in comparison with others. I want eyes to see God's goodness in the world.

At this moment, we are sitting in chairs we didn't make, wearing clothes that someone else most likely made, using electricity that we didn't invent or generate, carrying phones that are like magic they can do so many things. Our world is so full of glory, we can even begin to grasp it, so we don't. We often just exist and think about the next thing we are going to do and going to want.

In today's story, we behold a breathtaking miracle that happens out of sight and yet it blesses thousands of people and everyone gets their fill. If we go back to the first miracle in John, it is changing of water to wine where once again everyone gets their fill, and once again, most people at the wedding have no idea a miracle occurred.

The Lord pays attention to us closer than we pay attention to ourselves. He knows exactly what we need and he is overwhelming with gifts every moment of our lives. He is not simply blessing us physically with food and clothes, he gives his very life to us. He gives us His body for bread and his blood for wine.

He takes what we perceive as meager and transforms it into abundance. As we pause to rejoice on this fourth Sunday of Lent, let us pray that we might see more clearly the many ways he blesses us from day to day. That we might be overwhelmed with joy at his attention toward us and his goodness toward. And that like the disciples, we might participate in his abundant blessings upon the people in need both nearby and far away.