

10<sup>th</sup> p Pentecost

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John 6:1-15

How Far Will They Go Among So Many?

Rev. George Ferch

Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus, one in Christ,

“One in Christ” was the theme for our 63<sup>rd</sup> WELS synod convention last week at MLS in Saginaw, MI. I assure you we conducted on your behalf all the devotions, and all the earthly business in exactly that spirit; as “One in Christ.” We opened the convention with Word and sacrament. We closed around the Word singing, “*Praise God from whom all blessings flow.*” I wish all of you could have been with me to gather around Jesus and have him feed you as he fed us.

An important question, a necessary question is who is this Jesus? Who is this Christ we follow to sit at his feet and who feeds us? We see who Jesus Christ is as he acts in answer to Andrew’s question, **How Far Will They Go Among So Many?** Jesus provides as much as we need. Yet he is not an earthly king.

Five thousand men plus women and children with them had followed Jesus “because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.” Jesus’ miracles were just that, signs, that he is the all-powerful and all compassionate God in the flesh. Jesus’ miracles pointed to him as much more than what the people thought. They thought he was a new prophet like Moses but only a man like Moses. They misunderstood Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 18:15 that God would raise up a prophet like him.

Even though the people had the wrong idea about the Messiah and what he would do for them, Jesus taught them the truth of his words to seek first the kingdom of God and all material needs surely will follow. How could that happen there, way out in the middle of nowhere?

Jesus provides as much as we need. Our God already had in mind what he was going to do yet he put the problem to his disciple Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?” Here was Philip’s chance to live his trust in Jesus’ power and compassion as God but instead said, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.” In other words, it is impossible.

Andrew took notice of a boy with “five small barley loaves and two small fish.” Peter’s brother expressed his doubts with the words of our theme, “But how far will they go among so many?” In other words, it is impossible.

Some today try to explain away Jesus’ miracle by claiming the people actually all had their own lunch and pooled their resources. They ignore the purpose of the miracle as a sign that Jesus is all-powerful and all compassionate because he is God by saying the lesson here is be charitable and generous like Jesus to others less fortunate.

Jesus provides as much as we need. He repeated his miracle of giving enough manna and quail to Israel as they traveled in the wilderness. God repeated the miracle he did when the prophet Elisha fed a multitude with only twenty loaves of barley bread. They had leftovers too.

Jesus fed the multitude as a sign that he indeed is the Messiah, the Promised Anointed One who was to come. Jesus described himself as the bread that came down from heaven to feed our spiritual hunger of sin, guilt and fear. Jesus is the food that nourishes and sustains us to eternal life. Jesus promised, “Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.” Jesus’ cross is the table he

has set where we can come eat and drink of forgiveness for our sins and eternal salvation in heaven.

Jesus provided as much as the people needed. The Lord in the miracle of redemption has brought us into a right relationship, a saving relationship with God. Through the miracle of Jesus' perfect life and innocent death he feeds us. So we daily and honestly in the confession of our sins sit down at the table of gracious love the Lord has set before us in Jesus Christ and dig in until we are satisfied

There is another aspect to the question **“How Far Will They Go Among So Many?”** Jesus is not an earthly king. Jesus showed that by doing the miracle.

The crowds who had enjoyed Jesus' largess for their stomachs missed the point about the Messiah feeding their souls. Rather than following Jesus in faith as their Savior, they were going to grab him, take him back to Jerusalem and restore David's throne. “Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”

Today, we call the idea in the Christian church of the coming Messiah's reign to be on earth, Millennialism. These beliefs are not true: Jesus will come again to set up his kingdom on earth. He will drive out opposition and give believers nothing but success and prosperity. He will grant them every wish and fulfill every desire. In other words, they make Jesus king by force so he will their personal servant. This heresy is more complicated in its details but that is the gist of it.

We find a parallel in the theology of glory, success preaching and teaching. In effect it makes Jesus a king by force. It makes Jesus my personal servant who exists to make me successful and prosperous because I follow him. The theology of glory gives an all new and wrong meaning to what St. Matthew says about Jesus, “the Son of Man did come to be served but to serve.” It makes a mockery of the rest of the verse “and to give his life as a ransom for many.”[20:28]

Jesus makes no such millennial promises. Jesus did not spread a table in the desert so that we can make him a king by force. Jesus did not promise us glory here on earth but crosses. My life as a Christian is not about self-fulfillment but about self-denial. My life is to seek his Word first and know the rest will follow.

It is helpful to put this miracle in the context of the rest of chapter six in John's gospel. Jesus continued teaching the crowds that followed him. Jesus went on to declare that he is “the Bread of Life.”

What was the result? “From this time on many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” Why? They did not believe in Jesus as their Savior. They wanted him only so long as he gave them what they wanted. Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Peter confessed for the Twelve, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the holy one of God.”

God grant that we may always echo the disciples' confession of faith. With them, we are one in Christ. Amen. <SDG>