

2 Samuel 11:1-15  
Psalm 14  
Ephesians 3:14-21  
John 6:1-21

The deceptive part of hearing a familiar piece of scripture is our assumption that it holds nothing new for us to learn. The story that we have just heard appears in all four of the gospels with some minor differences in the telling, so we know that it's important. There are details and nuances in this particular retelling of the story that help guide us to the deeper meanings we may have missed in the three other versions or perhaps have simply forgotten over the years.

Prior to the lesson we have just heard, Jesus rebukes those who have rejected him. He reminds them that the works that the Father has given him to complete are the very works that he is doing and that those works testify to the fact that the Father has sent him. He says to them, "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?" [John 5:45-47]. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the crowds are giving Jesus a hard time, are questioning him, and discounting him, they still follow him when he goes to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As a matter of fact, it was a large crowd that kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick and they were both curious and hopeful so they were drawn to him.

Through this story, the gospel of John conveys that Jesus embodies the power of the God of Israel...stronger and more powerful than any other prophet in the history of Israel...including Moses. However, there are a number of parallels between Moses and this story of Jesus that are worth looking at. When Jesus got to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, he went up the mountain with his disciples. Moses had gone up the mountain as well, but he went alone, not with any of his companions. When Jesus and his disciples sat down on the mountain they saw the crowd that had followed them. Jerusalem was packed with people because the festival of the Passover was near and many out-of-towners had travelled to Jerusalem for the celebration. Throughout this particular story about Jesus, we see lots of parallels between Jesus and Moses. It's no accident that what Jesus did at this time in the shadow of Jerusalem and on the Eve of the Passover celebration underscores his connection with the prophets of old and his heartstopping power given to him by God. As we hear the story about the feeding of the five thousand, we can't help but make the connections with Moses having petitioned God for food for the people in the wilderness when they were starving and God answering him by providing

daily manna to feed them. Moses didn't provide the manna. God did. Moses was simply the petitioner. In today's lesson, it is Jesus himself who actually provides the bread through multiplication.

The parallels with the Holy Eucharist seem obvious as well. For example, Jesus asks his disciples "Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat?" even though Jesus knew that he was going to provide the bread himself. When Jesus was given the five loaves of barley bread...poor people's bread...he blessed it and he distributed it himself to those who were seated. There was a direct connection between Jesus and the people who were fed through him and by him. Can you imagine looking in Jesus' eyes as he gave you a piece of bread? In the other three gospels, Jesus gives the blessed bread to his disciples to distribute which makes us think of the hierarchy in the organized church in which the clergy bless the bread and distribute it. It leads us to believe that perhaps this feeding was a precursor to the establishment of Holy Eucharist...but let's not get too far ahead of ourselves in this story. There are similarities, but there's much to glean from these passages *before* we get to Holy Eucharist.

This experience does, however, leave us remembering about Moses, his leading of the chosen people through the desert and God feeding the people on a daily basis with manna from heaven which could not be stored. In this new 'feeding' story, however, Jesus instructs his disciples to gather up all the scraps after everyone had had their fill to eat and they collected 12 baskets of food to be used later. At this point in the story, the people who had been following him...and doubting him along the way...declared that Jesus was indeed the prophet who was to come into the world...the one who would be even greater than Moses. They were convinced and they wanted to seize Jesus by force and make him a king. But Jesus would have no part of that. Jesus knew that his kingdom had nothing to do with earthly politics even though the ones following him had no understanding of Jesus' kingdom. All they knew was that they needed a king...one who would replace King David and one who would lead them as Moses had...and one who would release them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. And God had promised them a king! They were convinced that Jesus could fill both those roles, but Jesus wasn't interested in filling those roles and he fled once more to the mountain. He knows he is not a political figure and he will not allow people to use him for their own purposes. He doesn't allow that now, either! The healing that he does and the gifts he provides fulfill a need that he sees, not that people demand of him on their terms. Sometimes it feels as if we want Jesus on our own terms, and when that's the case, we don't want Jesus, we just want our fill of whatever it is that we want.

After Jesus disappeared, the disciples got into a boat and began to cross the Sea of Galilee and return to Capernaum. It was evening. The sun was going down and as they were trying to cross the sea, it became rough and the winds were fierce. Any storm that overtakes us in the dark

always feels more threatening than it does in the daylight when we can see more clearly. As the winds and the waves raged, out in the middle of the sea and batted around by the storm, the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water and they were terrified. This is not the only story in the New Testament of Jesus walking on water. The other gospels reveal a similar story. Jesus did speak to them. He said, "It is I. Do not be afraid." The same words that are translated "It is I" can also be translated as "I am" or "Ego Eimie" which is the name God revealed to Moses about himself. It was the same as if Jesus had said, "I am God." This is another instance in which Jesus is being identified as the Son of God...the prophet who is to come...the one who is much more powerful than even Moses. Like the prophets, Jesus was sent by God, performs signs and has knowledge that goes beyond human understanding. But Jesus is so much more. Jesus himself has identified himself as God's Son. There is no mention, however, that Jesus got into the boat with the disciples. He refuses to be 'captured' by them just as he has refused to do their political bidding by becoming king. And he refuses to be captured by us. The next we hear about Jesus is when he is found in Capernaum...on the other side of the Sea of Galilee...and no one knows how he got there...and he doesn't volunteer an explanation!

This passage appears to be preparing us for the establishment of the Holy Eucharist and the description of Jesus as the Bread of Life that will come in the next two Sunday gospel lessons. But this particular passage is much more about establishing the identity of Jesus...his true nature...the reality that he is, in fact the Son of God, the prophet who will come after Moses and will be greater than Moses. All of these scenarios have taken place in order to make exactly that point.

As we move into the gospel lessons for the next two Sundays, we will hear more details about Jesus as the Bread of Life and the intricacies and nuances of the Holy Eucharist that we celebrate together on a regular basis. While this morning's passage prepares us for that, it has established the fact that Jesus is the one the Hebrews have been looking for...have been waiting for...the prophet who is greater than Moses...the one who is the Son of God.

Jesus hears our cries and our pleas for help. Jesus knows our needs even better than we do. He understands when we look all around us at the never ending needs or our own and of our fellow human beings. He understands our sense of helplessness and our fears of there not being enough resources...not only for ourselves, but to share with those around us. We need to remember that with our Lord Jesus Christ, in His service to our needs and the needs of others, there is no such thing as "there's not enough." Our paralysis at the size of the problems we see needs to be turned over to Jesus, the One who can and will help us do something about those problems...and through whom there is always hope and always enough.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.