

Proper 12B
John 6:1-21
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July 26, 2015

Entrust everything to God

In recent weeks our gospel readings have been from Mark, but today we shift gears, moving on to the Gospel of John. Our lectionary had skipped over the portion in Mark's gospel when we would have read about the feeding of the 5000 and the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, so slipping into this reading today of John's Gospel can feel like a natural fit, a way of finishing out last week's chapter of Mark.

But this fourth gospel is quite different from any of the other three, for John's gospel shares with us a distinct view of Jesus. Here, Jesus is in control, completely aware of his surroundings, and all knowing as to what will occur next. If we dig into the text, this viewpoint can help us better understand what it means to accept our Lord, to open ourselves towards a growing life of faith, and to live into a life in Christ.

The crowds keep following Jesus. They've seen the signs, they've heard of the healings. Jesus sees the crowds coming and is already anticipating their needs. He asks Philip a rhetorical question about feeding the masses, for Jesus already *knows* the answer. His question is a test to see if his closest followers understand *who he is*, and Philip fails. Philip's a practical guy...he sees the tangible, the material, the real. Andrew joins in the response, pointing out the scarcity, the few scraps of food that are available. What is that among so many?

Neither Philip, nor Andrew, nor any of the twelve could *imagine* God's abundance. Their human expectations *could not see* God's possibilities. They only see what is possible, based on human terms. But Jesus knows, for Jesus is One with God. Jesus takes, gives thanks, and distributes food to the enormous crowd. He feeds the masses and all are satisfied. Abundance out of scarcity. Abundance beyond what *anyone* could have hoped for or imagined. John's gospel is telling us that ***everything should be entrusted to God.***

But the crowds don't really understand. They saw the abundance, the twelve leftover baskets of fragments. But they interpreted this miraculous sign through their own worldly lens, through views formed by family and society, culture and religion. They saw only what they could see, what their dreams and hopes let them see: a Moses-like prophet who would lead them out of oppression, who could be their kind of king. But they missed the point. They misunderstood. Their kind of king was not what they needed, but instead a false hope. But Jesus knew. He knew what they wanted, and he knew what they actually needed. Before the crowds could act, he withdrew, going off by himself to the mountain.

This miracle of the multiplicity, the bounty coming from the few loaves and fishes, did open the people to a glimpse of faith. But it was a limited faith, for the people did not yet understand that they needed to set aside their own expectations, set aside their myopic vision of the possibilities, and instead open themselves, with humility to the Living God. They were not yet ready to entrust everything to God.

Isn't it so very human for us to try to *remake* Jesus into the image of what we *think* our Savior should be — to try, like the crowd, to transform Jesus into ***our*** kind of king. Our humanness makes it is so easy to fall into this trap, to envision a *small Jesus*, a Jesus who fits *into a box* of our own making. A Jesus who agrees with us, who sees the world like we do, whether it be our interpretation of Scripture,

our politics, our point of view. A Jesus who is simply the short-term solver of our problems, who takes care of all our desires and dreams, and aligns with what we think is right.

But God's ways are not our ways. And sometimes we can't see God, we can't hear God, until we are ready to relinquish control, until we are ready to get ourselves out of the way.

While the crowds did not really see who Jesus was, the disciples would begin to. For later that evening, they began their trip across the Sea of Galilee. But the sea became too rough and they were stuck for hours. They were in trouble. In spite of their skill as fisherman, their experience and capabilities, they had *lost control*. They couldn't make it to shore. But then they saw Jesus, walking across the water, a terrifying and incredible manifestation of the divine.

This extraordinary night — with the storm, the impossible sea journey, and the awe at the sight of Jesus — all combined to make possible for the disciples a different kind of encounter with our Savior, an encounter without preset expectations or preconceived ideas, an encounter of complete openness to freely receive this visible sign of God. In that moment, they entrusted everything to God. And they all could clearly hear Jesus revealing himself, "I AM. Do not fear. I AM."

Words of salvation, words of comfort. Words that reveal the truth of Jesus as their Lord and Savior, that Jesus is One with God. And with this acceptance, the disciples find that they have immediately landed on the shore. A seemingly insurmountable problem is solved, as Jesus is received, as the Savior is accepted in their hearts.

We too face darkness in our lives, impossible times when we can feel overwhelmed with events and concerns. We can be deeply shaken by national or world events. I know I was heartbroken as I learned of yet another mass shooting at a movie theater in Lafayette, Louisiana. It's less than 30 minutes from my childhood home. And it's impossible not to recognize that this shooting follows far too closely events in Chattanooga and Charleston. At times, darkness can be almost palpable.

But being in the darkness can help us to recognize our need for God's light. These times *can be* a new beginning, a time for us to step out in faith and entrust everything to God. For we do need God's help to find the courage to collaborate in community on truly complex issues: issues like mental illness and gun violence, racism and systemic injustice. We do need God's help to set aside our egos, our pride, our need to be right, and instead to deeply listen to others and find solutions to mutual concerns. We do need God's help to assist us in setting aside our concerns and fears about those who are in some way different than us, and instead to see in others the face of Christ.

Openness and acceptance are hard. It is frightening to let go of control. But our Savior invites us to hear his revelation. "I AM. Do not Fear. I AM." We can entrust everything to God. We are invited to open ourselves to the Spirit of life and truth, to accept Christ's never-ending love, to continue together *in community* on our journeys to follow our Savior, with the hope, through grace, of the God-sized gift of eternal life. For all is possible with God.

I'd like us to prayer together the prayer found in the Book of Common Prayer on page 824, Prayer 28. And I'd like to encourage you all to join me in continuing to pray this specific prayer in the upcoming weeks. It's a prayer specifically for times of conflict.

Let us pray.

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.