

**Weekend of Sunday, July 25, 2021**  
**9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 17/Proper 12/Year B**  
**First Reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44**  
**Second Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21**  
**Gospel Reading: John 6:1-21**  
**Sermon Title: “Inviting Jesus to Our Table”**

## **Theme**

*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.*

## **Text**

### **First Reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44**

<sup>42</sup>A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to [Elisha,] the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, “Give it to the people and let them eat.” <sup>43</sup>But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred people?” So he repeated, “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’ ” <sup>44</sup>He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

### **Gospel Reading: John 6:1-21**

<sup>1</sup>Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup>When 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?” <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.

But what are they among so many people?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus 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. <sup>11</sup>Then 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. <sup>12</sup>When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.

<sup>14</sup>When 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.”

<sup>15</sup>When 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.

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

## Sermon

Before we get too far along, I want to teach you something. There are three great prophets written about in the Old Testament. The first one is Moses. The second is *Elijah*. There is a definite *j* sound in his name. Please repeat, *Elijah*.

Elijah was arguably the second greatest prophet behind Moses and most of what is written about him is in First Kings. He is also mentioned in the synoptic gospels as appearing with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

However, he is *not* mentioned in the First Reading from Second Kings. That would be *Elisha*, with a *sh* sound compared to the *j* sound in Elijah. So repeat, *Elisha*.

Elijah was a great man of God and a miracle worker in his own right and considered the dean of the school of prophets known as “the sons of the prophets”.

There are two people about whom scripture says were *assumed* into heaven, meaning they didn't die, they were just taken into heaven by God. The first was Enoch who, according to Genesis simply wouldn't die, so at the age of 365 God just "took him". Elijah was the second and scripture says that he was assumed into heaven by firey horse and chariot! Now, the Catholic church teaches that Mary was assumed too, but that comes from Catholic tradition, not scripture.

In the biblical narrative, Elisha was a disciple and protégé of Elijah, and just before Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire, he gave Elisha a double portion of his power. Elisha then went on to perform twice as many miracles as Elijah. Elisha is the main character of the First Reading from Second Kings. And the reason that story is part of the lection for today is because of the story's similarity to the Gospel Reading from John.

The Feeding of the Five-Thousand, is the only sign or miracle that appears in all four gospels, although each one is slightly different. Two differences that might be of interest to you are:

- 1) There seems to be some confusion among the gospelers about the number of people fed. John indicates “5000 in all” while Matthew indicates “5000 men, besides women and children.” Nevertheless, a bunch of people was fed.

2) And 2, only John told us that the only person who was prepared with food that day was a boy. The other gospelers simply wrote that they *came up* with the loaves and fish.

To the first detail about how many were served that day – I don't think it matters, at least as far as today's sermon goes. To the second detail, I think it matters immensely, and this pandemic season that we are still in is a good reminder for what this passage lifts up.

Sometime after we went into isolation (between mid-March and the beginning of June) the Give Table wisely suggested that I regularly express thanks to you, our members who continue to be faithful in your support of your church even when it might appear that your church is doing very little – which was not the case, but I don't want to sound defensive. The point is that it was the wisdom of the Give Table to regularly thank the membership and I agreed with that then and still do now.

What was behind that initial thought *might have been*, a *what-if* scenario – what if the membership doesn't continue to support its church? The answer would have been disastrous. We would have probably been forced to close when the money ran out. But I don't recall that we ever went there. As I recall the thinking, we simply felt like we should thank you for supporting your church financially no matter what you *got back* from it. As I recall, the recommendation was more of a *faith, trust, and thanks* issue than a *concern* issue –

- faith in God because we could see no reason that God would want Zion to fail;
- trust that you the membership would be faithful to your church;
- and the thanks was just expressing how we really felt in those precarious months – and it's not over yet.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus and the Disciples were faced with an insurmountable problem too. There were 5000 hungry people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They had followed Jesus from the other side of the lake and as we heard last week, “he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34).

So there is the problem: There were a lot of determined hungry people who were not going to be turned away, and compassionate Jesus who was not about to send them away hungry. What to do?

According to John, Jesus asked Philip what the plan was, although John included this note:

<sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself [Jesus] knew what he was going to do.

*And then Andrew said,* <sup>9</sup>“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

And then without much more instruction, Jesus turned the predicament into a teachable moment. He took what little they (the entire crowd) had, lifted it up to God giving thanks, and then gave it to the Disciples to distribute. And as you all know, all were satisfied, and when they gathered up the leftovers (is anyone surprised that Jesus is a good steward?), there was more than they started with.

How did this happen? I'm so glad you asked. I have no idea! John called it a sign, not a miracle – and that is because when John wrote his account he wanted his readers to know that Jesus Christ had superiority over the laws of nature. And indeed, the response of the people was to attempt to take him by force and make him their king. But Jesus' mission was so much more than an earthly king. And so he withdrew from them again.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Well, what is the point? The point is, that as a church our success, or viability, or vitality is not dependent on our individual wealth or our individual faithfulness at all. God will take whatever we can bring to the offering plate; or to the food pantry; or to the work detail, and when we bring it in faith and love, God revealed in Jesus Christ will transform it into enough. This is our teachable moment!

You and I, we, the members of this church believe that our church remains a vital part of the community

- and that we get to live out our lives of discipleship through it,
- and we get to worship and pray in it,

- and get forgiven and fed at it to be sent out from it to do it all again.

If we didn't believe it, we wouldn't support it, and if we didn't support it, I doubt God in Christ would support it either, because this story indicates that God in Christ chooses to work through those who have faith in him.

In my visits, more than one homebound member has wanted me to know that though they can't do much, they contribute what they can. They, and all of us, no matter how big the contribution, represent that one little boy who came and gave what he had, and it made all the difference.

And this truth works on an individual basis too. We don't have to be Elisha or Jesus to make a difference. It is not the adequacy of our time, our talents, or our treasure that finally makes the difference: it is the power of Jesus working in the littlest and least and all the rest of us, to transform this world into the world God desires, a world where all the hungry are satisfied.

Here is what we can do. Get over the fussing over whether our contribution of time, talent, and treasure is enough. When we give it out of faith and love it will be enough. God in Christ will see to it.

### **Prayer**

Providing God, we give you thanks for your forgiveness and faithfulness. Your Son and our Lord Jesus gave everything he had for us. You do not ask that of us. All you ask is that we give a portion back, and Jesus will bless it and make it enough. Give us glad and generous hearts so that we may continue to experience your blessings. And bless those for whom we do ministry as well. It is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen