

## Wanna Make a Miracle Real?

**9 Pentecost B July 25, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed**

### **1<sup>st</sup> 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 & fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people & 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 & let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat & have some left.'" <sup>44</sup>He set it before them, they ate, & had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

### **Gospel: 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 & sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jewish people, was near. <sup>5</sup>When he looked up & 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>Jesus said this to test Philip, 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 & 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 5,000 in all. <sup>11</sup>Then Jesus took the loaves, & 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, & 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 & 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, & started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, & 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 & coming near the boat, & they were terrified. <sup>20</sup>But Jesus said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup>Then they wanted to take him into the boat, & immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

## Overview

In recent years many books have been printed that focus on baking vast assortments of breads—from rye to pumpernickel, French to Italian. Today, however, we encounter a bread that points to both a deeper longing, physically & spiritually, & an even more fulfilling outcome than the tastiest assortment of baked bread. This abundance of bread satisfies hunger, transforms lives, & ushers in a new vision of the holy in community. Recognizing the power of action, John calls to mind the ways prophets fed & nourished the people, & then he multiplies this in the person & action of Jesus. Jesus uses earthly gifts to provide for the gathered community—the gospel’s vision of Jesus’ life & God’s abundance in creation. 2 Kings & John allow our congregations to wonder with the faithful servants & disciples how God will provide. The scriptures today open a door for us to think about how individuals & communities are nourished & sustained by God, & also imagine how we become vessels of the holy who are now opened to the call of service. How might ordinary gifts (& ordinary people) become the ways God’s love & mercy are multiplied in sustenance for neighbor, community, & world? Through our questions, our acts of giving, & our proclamation of the works of God in Christ Jesus, we are invited to experience what it means to be rooted in God’s sustaining love & to proclaim this God who invites us into the unimaginable vision of abundance.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44**

Today’s reading is part of a larger section of 2 Kings that describes the miracles of Elisha, the successor to Elijah. Here the prophet gives food to a hungry crowd. Though there is not enough food to go around, Elisha trusts God, who provides enough & even more to satisfy the need. The books we call 1 Kings & 2 Kings were written probably by one religious historian in the mid-sixth century bce who viewed events in light of the theology of Deuteronomy: if Israel & Judah are faithful to the covenant, they will be blessed by God; if not, they will be punished. In 2 Kings 4, the miracle worker Elisha, who is remembered for healing a foreign general & raising the dead, feeds a hundred people with twenty barley loaves, “according to the word of the Lord” (v. 44). This story is one of many Old Testament references to the hope that the messiah would feed the poor. For these 4 weeks, stories of miraculous feedings from the Old Testament complement the gospel reading from John 6. It is likely that the 4<sup>th</sup> evangelist had the Elisha story in mind: this account is the only one in which Jesus uses barley bread. For John, Jesus himself is the word of God.

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

For the next 5 Sundays, our gospel readings come from John, rather than from Mark. The Gospel of Mark was the earliest gospel written, about 70 ce, & the Gospel of John the last, about 100 ce. All 5 weeks will focus on Jesus as the bread of life. Come to worship, to hear & to eat. The story of Jesus feeding the multitude is told 6 times in the 4 gospels. John's account fills chpt 6, & the attention the 4<sup>th</sup> evangelist gives the story probably reflects the church's growing sense of the importance of the weekly assembly meal. In John, the loaves are barley, which was the bread of the poor, as well as being the bread of the Elisha story. By setting the event near Passover, when the messiah was expected to appear, John uses the story to proclaim Jesus' messianic identity. Jewish expectation of the messianic banquet included references to fish, perhaps thought to be the sea monster now destroyed & eaten. 12 baskets of leftovers remain, a sign of completion, enough for all the twelve tribes, or perhaps of the ongoing mission of the disciples. The following narrative of Jesus crossing the sea by walking on water recalls the story of the Exodus. Jesus' answer to the disciples, *Ego eimi* in Greek, can be translated either "It's I" or "I am who I am," the very name of God in Exodus. "Here I Am" might best render this christological claim.

### **Images in the Readings**

The most common biblical image for divine mercy is **food**. In Gen. 1, the plants & trees that God created are given to humans as food. Ancient narratives told of God providing food during famine. The Israelites' memories of their nomadic years recalled a miraculous food, manna, which God sent to keep them alive in the wilderness. Religious rules commanded the faithful to share their food with the hungry & to abstain from eating with the wicked. Disobedience was met with the punishment of famine. The people of Israel themselves were likened to food that God had planted. Food or fast was central to all the primary religious festivals of the Old Testament. Christ was born in Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." In John's metaphoric theology, Christ is the bread of life. We need food to live, & Christians have each week served out the word & the sacrament as the food that Christ continues to distribute to those of us who are hungry. Christians need not wonder whether the miracle of the feeding occurred back then; it occurs each week. (*Thanks to SundaysandSeasons.com*)

**A. See & Receive**

**B. Participate in Head/Heart rather than Spectate/Evaluate**

**C. Lean in with Action**