

Shirley

John 6:1-21

We leave the Gospel of Mark for several weeks to explore what it means that Jesus is the Bread of Life. Today's story is the only one that appears in all four gospels. John's telling illustrates what faith in God looks and acts like. Jesus works with very little but leads the disciples to see that God provides not just enough -- but much more than they ever could have imagined.

For the disciples, it's personal. When the lesson has ended, they each have their own basket to carry away -- a reminder of God's sufficiency in the time of need.

Then, Jesus walks on water in the midst of a storm (and transports not only the disciples, but their boat, to safety) illustrates even further how little we need fear when God is the strength of our lives.

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 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?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 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. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 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."

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. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 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. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Fed!

They came from the north, they came from the south, they came from the east, they came from the west. They came seeking a moment of healing... the healthy ones, supporting their weaker loved ones. From miles and miles away, they traveled. The sick and the infirm, the outcasts and sinners. The people everyone else cast aside like last week's leftovers. Thousands and thousands of people- elderly grandparents, young children, women and men, all hoping to see this wonderful man named Jesus.

All of them were seeking wholeness... reconciliation... a new chance to live their lives.

And we know this story so well. We hear the disciples say they don't have enough money to serve so many hungry mouths. We see the little boy with his meager offering – only a handful of loaves and fish. We see the disciples with their baskets overflowing with food. And we know that there was more than enough to go around.

"Who is this man?" the people thought. He's more than a healer, maybe he's the Promised One. After years of being dominated by the Roman Empire,

the people began to think that maybe he was the one to lead them to freedom, just like Moses did so many generations years ago.

The murmurs grew louder and louder as their stomachs were filled with food. Maybe, just maybe, he's the one.

And of course, he was the one... just not the one they expected.

There was so much more than a little bread and fish for everyone. Jesus was teaching all of us an important lesson about who God is.

You would think by now that those poor apostles would have figured it out. Since when does Jesus do things the way anyone expects? Over five thousand people fed that afternoon, with plenty left over. And that wasn't even the end of the story.

Later that day, the grass still bent over from where all those people had gathered, the disciples are out in a boat, and Jesus shows up unexpectedly. John tells us they were three or four miles out, huddled together in the middle of a storm, the dead of night all around them, when Jesus appears walking on the water calming first the storm, then the disciples. Pulling them to safety.

Two dramatic stories linked together by Jesus, who does something totally unexpected, and changes the lives of those around him forever. The disciples, the little boy, the unnamed thousands who are served -- they never dreamed what was going to happen when Jesus got a hold of that bread and those fish. Not one of the disciples expected Jesus to stroll up beside their boat, after they had rowed out some 4 miles, and greet them in the middle of a storm.

Jesus constantly does things that no one expects. Our faith is filled with stories about a Messiah who shows up in unexpected places, in unexpected ways. Story after story tell about the ways we witness him in the world.

Maybe the problem is that we set our expectations too low. The people gathered looking for healing, they left seeking a new king who would save them from political oppression. Both are very human desires: freedom from pain... freedom from oppressors.

But Jesus shows us in the most amazing ways that in God, so much more is possible. More than our low expectations.

Where Philip and Andrew saw too little food or money to serve the masses, Jesus saw the possibility of abundance.

Where the people saw new royalty, Jesus saw God's new kingdom breaking forth, offering each of us a new way to live, enveloped by God's sacred love.

Even in the face of the storm, Jesus surprises us as he defies gravity and common sense.

In Jesus, everything is possible.

And these are lessons we need to learn too. We know the stories so well but we don't live like we believe them. How often do we look around and think, "We are too small to make a difference in the community." I hear the stories of the glory days, when pews were filled and the voices of the choir soared. When Sunday was set aside for church – stores closed and no children's sports. But now, we live in a reality of smaller, older membership, big bills and an aging church to care for.

We are a small church in a small town. It's easy to act as if we are cast aside... like the crumbs left over after the feast... leftovers that no one wants or cares for. When we see so little, we forget that God sees so much.

Do you remember what Jesus did with the remnants of food? He sent the disciples out with baskets to gather them up, so nothing would be wasted. Leftover bread and fish, more than enough to go around. Together, they took those baskets onto the boat and safely took them to the other side. Y, because God will provide more than we can carry.