

“Tested to Grow”

+ 9 Pentecost B +

2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

July 26, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

One of the most time consuming reading curriculums I taught in the early ‘80’s had a pre and post-test for each skill. Grading was a nightmare but it was designed to give the teacher an idea how well each child was learning.

Today’s Gospel really takes off after the introduction about the place, “Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberius” and the time “Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near when Jesus gives the disciple, Philip, a pre-test and asks “Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat?” The correct answer, I suppose, would have been, “Only God knows” (as it would have affirmed Jesus as God and pointed to the need for a miracle). Philip, however, goes with logic, “Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” So, Philip failed, wouldn’t most of us? Think of the Ephesians who are worried about their Apostle Paul who is in prison and in peril – they worry, Paul prays – and more than that he prays for them that they might know the fullness of Christ – fullness he has known both in times of freedom and plenty and while in chains.

It is oh-so-difficult to admit we don’t know or we can’t do something and to turn it over to Jesus. Reborn by the gift of faith in the waters of baptism we children of God are not made to be self-reliant, but rather to be Christ-reliant—that’s why Jesus came, to do for us, what no human being can do. Salvation is not just about heaven when we die; it is also all about the way we live now and the way our “eyes wait upon” the One whose open hand supplies our needs. “The hand of the Lord feeds us; He answers all our needs.” We sang the words of the psalmist from thousands of years ago this morning because they are just as true today.

Andrew’s suggestion of a boy with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish has the added caveat, “but what are they among so many?” He’s offering something but knows a miracle would have to happen – perhaps a miracle like the one in the time of Elisha whose servant had 20 barley loaves and fresh grain that fed 100.

Indeed, such a miracle happens – significant to the people – a filling not only their bellies but fulfilling one of the “signs” they were looking for regarding Messiah. A great number of the Jews in Jesus day believed that when Messiah came, God would host a banquet for His chosen people. That idea came from the book of Isaiah and then later writings including of all people Gentiles – yes, Gentiles like you and me on the guest list! But here’s a sad side-note: according to this prophecy the Gentiles would come expecting to be seated, honored and fed, but they would be treated instead to an un-escapable plague that led to their doom. The book of Enoch (written between the Old and New Testaments) actually claims that among the guests would be the angel of death who would slaughter the Gentiles and only the chosen would wade through a sea of blood to sit down and dine with Messiah. **BUT NOT TO WORRY** – this fear goes away

with our becoming “children of God” by faith – heirs of the Kingdom - members of the body of Christ.

There on the shores of the Sea of Tiberius 5,000 people read the sign of the loaves and fishes as confirmation that Jesus “must be the promised prophet,” and according to John, “they were about to come and take (Jesus) by force to make Him (their) king.” That wouldn’t have gone over well with the local puppet King Herod Antipas. It didn’t go over well with Jesus either.

Did you catch the way John said it? He didn’t say they were going to make Jesus king by force (a Galilean coup de tat) but that they were going to take Jesus by force to make Him king. That’s where the 5000 fed fail the pre-test. They wanted to make the Messiah God sent into the Messiah they had in mind.

Human nature always gets it backwards. Human nature does not want to let God be God; it always wants to tell God how to be God. A gracious sign of bread for hungry people gets turned into “let’s make Jesus our vending machine.” I’m guilty of that; so are you. We offer deals, we insist, we demand, we beg, we plead. We choke on the words, “your will be done.” We all fail – fall short of the glory of God – but God, in mercy, does not leave us there. God grants us grace to grow.

In our text Jesus gives the 5000 and the disciples a chance to grow by leaving. He leaves the 5,000. He leaves the disciples. He provided the meal and they were the clean-up crew. We don’t know what happened to the twelve baskets of leftovers. I’m sure someone took them home.

What we do know is that what the disciples faced next was not a time of reflection but a time of great fear as they leave to cross by boat over the sea back to their home base in Capernaum. Having been seasick I can only imagine that some of the miracle loaves and fishes ended up in the Sea of Tiberius that night as they rowed against a strong wind for three or four miles. But that wasn’t the most terrifying – it was a crossing many of them had made countless times. No, the terror came in seeing Jesus walking on the sea. It was there that they again got a glimpse of God; they saw past the full belly “sign” as they were shown in miraculous glory in His walking on water and in His very words just Who Jesus was, is and every shall be.

Your bulletin insert says that as He got to the boat Jesus said, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” Well, not exactly. Jesus said “ego eimi” which is Greek for “I am,” which comes from Hebrew “hayah” which is where the Hebrew name of God “Yahweh or Jehovah” comes from.

Jesus didn’t simply walk out to that boat and say “Hey disciples, it’s me.” He invoked the name of God and applied it to Himself. He said you are seeing in me the “One True God – the Great I AM.” It is only in God Incarnate - in Jesus that we see God. And we see God there, not in judgment over us, not in condemnation because we’ve failed the test, but in a gracious invitation to set aside our fear of Him and to let faith replace fear.

That’s where, by faith, we grow. And it comes when all our false hopes and false presumptions crash and break upon the reality that God is God and we are not - and that our hope

is grounded upon Jesus who came, not to feed us with bread that spoils, but with Himself, the Bread (capitol "B") of Life (capitol "L.") Only then, can Jesus accomplish His work in us, not as the vending machine of temporary favors, but as the one who came among us to save us to pass every test for us that we might grow in grace and share with others salvation through Jesus Christ alone in word and in deed. Amen.

Now may our gracious God who placed a longing in our hearts for Him, lead us to know Jesus as our Bread of Life and grant us the grace to share Him with all the world.