

### John 6:1-15

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 the 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."

### John 6:16-21

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.

### "When Grace and Glory Abound"

In remembrance of the first Easter ---the day that Divine Love's miracle of life overcame the shadow of death---we gather on Sunday mornings like our pilgrim forefathers and foremothers in faith to worship God. Just like the hungry crowd who followed Jesus around because they saw what he was doing for the sick, we come here hungering for the Presence of God and seeking Jesus, our bread of life. And just like the disciples in the Bible story who became overwhelmed by the needs of their fellow human beings and became anxious by their limited ability to meet everyone's needs (let alone their own), we come with thankful hearts praising God for our shared gift of faith---that the impossible with us IS possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. Sunday is the Christian's day of Sabbath rest in which we gather to sing, pray, and hear the gospel stories about the way in which Jesus and his love establishes communion between humans and humans, between humans and God, between humans and the rest of creation (adapted from UCC Samuel Lectionary referencing John P. Burgess) . . . and even between hungry and fearful crowds.

In the feeding of the five thousand story, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy the bread for these people to eat?" Jesus knew that hunger quickly causes people to navel gaze. Hunger says, "I need something to eat, I want it now." Selfish hunger says what's mine is mine and what's yours is mine. Hunger makes souls forget that we are our brother's keeper and ignores God's promise to abundantly provide for all. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Jesus knew that fear would cause "scarcity thinking" to kick in. Philip's reply to Jesus says that fear *measures the scarcity carefully and says that there is never enough and certainly not enough for everyone* (UCC Samuel, July 16, 2009). Theologian Cousar comments: *cautious calculations that operate only*

*on the basis of possibility, calculations otherwise revered in our world, ignore the One who comes from above (3:31), the One who redefines what is possible (Texts for Preaching Year B).*

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Jesus "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Realistic people don't count on something they don't have. So when one of Jesus' disciples starting talking about the impossible, Jesus showed them what was possible with God. Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Little did the crowd know that when they sat down to get their piece of the pie that Jesus would be giving them a glimpse of the glory of God. It was only after they found a patch of green grass to sit upon, and 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, that they believed that the power of God's love for them was far more than they could ask or imagine (Eph. 3 :20b adapted). That day, faith in the One who redefines what is possible, grew as Jesus and his followers met every person at their point of need . . . and then some.

When John tells the calming of the sea story right after the feeding of the five thousand he is telling us that God wants hungry people fed and that Jesus is the One who can calm the church's we've never done it that way before fears. In commenting on these stories theologians remind us that *fear makes us feel like we're sinking, sinking in debt, sinking in despair, sinking in depression and addiction and loss. Fear makes us grab onto the wrong things to protect and even save us, to pull us out of the stormy seas. Fear makes us arm ourselves to the teeth and then miss the hand that is held out to us, telling us not to fear, not to struggle, but to recognize that God is God, and we are not and that we can float, in trust on the top of the water, relaxing, as Kierkegaard said, on the buoyancy of God* (UCC Samuel, July 26, 2009). Biblical scholars also wonder

if the stories have this to say to the church: *The disciples of Jesus were overwhelmed by the need before them. If they didn't feel a responsibility to meet that need, Jesus certainly raised their consciousness. They tried to assess the situation, measure their resources, and figure out a solution, but they seemed to feel powerless in the face of so many hungry people. Cheryl Bridges Johns draws a contrast between the power of God that was about to burst forth and the power that we think we have today: the power of knowledge. However, the better word she used for today's knowledge is: information, and perhaps information disembowels us by discouraging us with the "objective reality" of what lies before us, the statistics and hard cold facts. On the other hand, John's Gospel is "all about knowledge as power," not the knowledge as information that inundates us but "love's knowledge" which "multiplies the meager resources and makes a way forward when knowledge comes to its end . . . In the hands of Jesus, little can become much, the few can become the many, and the weak can become strong." Imagine, John suggests, God responding to our prayers for this world's needs with the question, "What do you have?"* (UCC Samuel, July 26, 2009).

We don't have to imagine because we know: Last week, within hours after Deacon Jenny Williams stood up during welcome time and asked for volunteers to provide meals for Maria's family---the need was met. Not only did the Baker family eat meatballs, chicken, stew, lasagna until they were satisfied---but they are still feasting on the abundance from the picnic cooler and being comforted with the knowledge of God's care. When God responds to the church's prayers for this world's needs with the question, "What do you have?" . . . the glory of God is multiplied and the grace of Jesus abounds. Many of you are still asking---can we provide them with more?