

John 6: 1-21  
"Quality"  
August 1, 2021  
Rev. Lou Nyiri

This morning's message is based upon John 6:1-21, let's lean in & listen...to God's word for us this day...

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

#### **Feeding the Five Thousand**

**6** After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>[a]</sup> **2** A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. **3** Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. **5** 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?" **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. **7** Philip answered him, "Six months' wages<sup>[b]</sup> would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" **10** Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they<sup>[c]</sup> sat down, about five thousand in all. **11** 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. **12** When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." **13** So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. **14** 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." **15** 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.

#### **Jesus Walks on the Water**

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

#### **Let us Pray:**

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come as the fire and burn,  
Come as the wind and cleanse,  
Come as the light and reveal,  
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth  
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,  
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

### Sermon

We, human beings, love round numbers.

Round numbers offer more than precisely measured information.  
According to *The Washington Post*, such figures are full of emotion. Research has revealed that  
“we love round numbers so much that we often regulate our behavior to achieve them.

Don't believe it?

Think about your fitness tracker – fitbit / pedometer / smart phone health app

It's 11:45 p.m. and you see you have walked 9,874 steps. What do you do? You start walking around your room, into the hallway, down the stairs, around the dining room table. You're trying to make up those 126 additional steps so you can feel the sublime satisfaction of 10,000-step perfection.

Think about filling your vehicle gas tank–

You're standing there at the pump and it lands on \$49.76 – now you know your tank is pretty near full – however you can't return the nozzle to the pump until that number reaches \$50.00. There's some sort of nirvana found in squeeze-clicking until you reach that \$50.00 mark as you stand there at the self-serve pump...as you stand there awaiting nirvana...you're really only standing there....**fueling yourself**.

Think about the sports world –

A baseball player will exert more effort when their performance falls just short of a round number. A player with a .298 batting average will work with their hitting instructor to get that average up to .300.

Round numbers somehow appeal to us. Perhaps it's because they say something about quality.

Not quantity ... *quality*.

According to a *Management Science* study, round numbers on a restaurant's menu send a message of quality. The \$15.00 shrimp cocktail sounds more appetizing than the \$14.99 one.

Which brings us to today's gospel reading in John & Jesus feeding the 5,000.

This miracle is the only one that appears in all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), thus we can fathom it is somehow critically important to the good news narrative about Jesus put forth by those good-news book writers.

The exact number of diners though is a bit fuzzy – John writes, the crowd was “about five thousand in all” (6:10).

Yet, Matthew says “those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children (14:21). The total number could have easily been double or triple the number of men ... 10 or even 15,000 – both of which are still nice, round numbers.

Although the exact number of diners who ate the loaves and fishes is uncertain, all the gospels make clear that this miracle is the feeding of the 5,000.

This round number signals quality – not some cut-rate discount.

The feeding of the 5,000 shows God’s abundant care for us & God’s desire to give us nothing less than the bread of life.

It’s a miracle of quality.

There is an aspect of abundance to this miracle story. When the large crowd comes marching toward Jesus and the disciples, Jesus engages Philip in a little game. He asks Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” Philip panics & stammers, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little” (6:5-7).

Philip feels the scarcity of resources in the face of enormous need. *We don’t have the budget; we don’t have the time or the energy...this is bigger than us, Jesus.*

Another disciple, Andrew, offers something a bit better. “There’s a boy here,” Andrew says, “who has five barley loaves and two fish.” Andrew starts out in a good direction – offering a potential solution – then he hits the brakes and sighs, “But what are they among so many people?” (vv. 8-9).

Jesus shakes his head – probably offers a wry smile – for He knows what’s about to happen – what he’s going to do. Perhaps Jesus is offering a teachable moment.

“Make the people sit down,” Jesus says to the disciples. He takes the loaves, gives thanks and distributes the bread to the people on the grass. He also distributes the fish and they have as much as they want. They are filled until they are completely satisfied (vv. 10-11).

It is an abundance moment. It is a miracle of quality.

Then, as a way of showing there is much more in this meal than anyone could eat, Jesus has the disciples gather up the leftovers, and they fill 12 baskets to the top. So impressed are the people, they begin to talk amongst themselves, saying, “This is indeed the prophet who is come into the world” (vv. 12-14).

The feeding of the 5,000 shows the abundance of God’s care for us.

God doesn’t want us to go hungry or lack anything that we really need for life. While this doesn’t mean every dinner table needs a \$15.00 prawn cocktail, it does mean God desires that our

needs are met. God still wants crowds of hungry people to be fed, often by us and other faithful people.

In this morning's story, it was a boy who had the loaves and fishes – it was one among them – one oft overlooked who had what the community needed – in order to make do...in the moment.

In today's story – meaning our story as a faith community called upon to live out the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in our life-setting – the feeding of hungry people will: Sometimes come from generous giving. Sometimes it will come from being better stewards of what we have been given.

Whether it is through generosity of gift – or – stewardship of gifts – the end result is caring comes through people!

Pope Francis made the statement about eight years ago, "Our grandparents used to make a point of not throwing away leftover food. Consumerism has made us accustomed to wasting food daily, and we are unable to see its real value." Then he made the pointed statement, "Throwing away food is like stealing from the table of those who are poor and hungry."

This story of Pope Francis reminds me of a story my father often told me about his mother – my grandmother whom I never met. He told me that my grandmother following many evening meals would take their leftover portions and make plates of food that she would give to my dad who was a young boy at the time and tell him to take them to the next door neighbors. My father one day said, "Mom, why are you making me do this? We can eat this later." My grandmother raised her finger to him and through a thick Hungarian accent in broken English told him, "Because they need it more than we do right now." At the time he didn't know the family to whom he delivered those meals was struggling due to a recent job shortage, however, his parents had discussed it and they were committed to caring for their neighbor family.

Pope Francis and my Grandmother were on to something.

If food is to abound, then it is up to us to be good stewards of what we have, so that everyone will have enough to eat.

In this feeding of the 5,000 miracle story, Jesus takes what is offered and in an abundance moment makes it that everyone in the crowd would be fed.

He then tells the disciples to gather the leftovers that nothing would be wasted.

As we go deeper into this miracle story we see it reveals that God desires nothing less than to give us the bread of life. This quality miracle – while being one of abundance – is also revealing in its gift of Jesus. "I am," Jesus declares later on in John's gospel, "the bread of life." Following that with, "whoever comes to me will never be hungry" (v. 35).

Jesus wants nothing less than for our physical hunger **and** our spiritual hunger to be satisfied.

Jesus' focus is not quantity as much as it is quality.

It is the whole person Jesus desires to feed – not solely the stomach.  
Jesus is not just bread – Jesus *is* bread of life!

The quality of this bread is revealed just moments later when after the feeding of the 5,000 the disciples get into that boat and start traveling across the Sea of Galilee.

The sea becomes rough due to strong winds – the disciples row fervently across deep and deadly waters.

Then they see Jesus walking across the rough water, and he says to them, “It is I; do not be afraid” (vv. 16-20).

It is dark and dangerous and Jesus fills them with the gift of his presence and power.

Our family loves the Royals. We like to see what the residents of Buckingham Palace are up to. One of our favorite ways to pass our in-home pandemic time was to watch *The Crown* on Netflix. *The Crown* tells the story of the British royal family. In one episode, Prince Philip (who you will recall just died this past year shy of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday) is feeling lost in middle age. Philip, a former pilot, becomes obsessed with the Apollo 11 mission and is thrilled when the moon landing is a success. When the three astronauts visit Buckingham Palace after the mission, Philip is excited to get some time with them to ask questions about the mission and learn of their most profound insights from outer space. He is looking to them for inspiration.

When he meets them he discovers they are just normal, young men who were doing their jobs on Apollo 11. It is both a dramatic and devastating moment for Philip. Granted the moment as depicted in the Netflix series is invented largely for the television drama.

What is historically accurate, however, is that Prince Philip became involved at the time in the creation of a retreat center called St. George’s House. Along with an Anglican priest, Prince Philip made St. George’s House a place for people to discuss religious and secular issues. Philip himself went on to give talks on the role of clergy in society, stressing the importance of bringing together scientists and theologians to try to find common ground.

Philip discovered that inspiration cannot be found in technology alone. One might say, Philip discovered, people need the bread of life, even more than an astronaut on the moon.

The feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus’ walking on the water are both miracles of quality.

They show us about God’s abundant care for us...

the desire of God to give us the bread of life...

the promise that Jesus will be with us even in the darkest, scariest moments of our lives.

Even amid a pandemic & the steps we take into life after a pandemic...

We are not alone.

We are met by the one who declares, “It is I; do not be afraid” & “I am the bread of life.”

In every time – In every place – In every situation, God wants nothing but the best for us.

We come to this Table:        to be met / to be fed / to be sent.

To God be the glory, this day & forevermore.

Alleluia and Amen.