

**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Year B)**

**August 1, 2021**

**John 6:24-35**

**St. Andrew Lutheran Church**

**The Rev. Pauline Farrington**

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It all started with five barley loaves and two dried fish set before a crowd of 5000 hungry people.

A little boy's lunch that, in Jesus' hands, was enough — more than enough — for all those people to be satisfied. Now it's the next day — the day after that miraculous picnic on the grass. And the crowd is hungry again.

But where is Jesus? He's nowhere to be found. They saw his disciples get into their boat and row away last night. Jesus didn't go with them, but still...they can't find him...and they're hungry.

You know that feeling, right? When hunger suddenly hits and you feel that aching emptiness in your stomach? Then how comforting it is when you feel that emptiness being filled by good food?

These people are hungry, maybe getting frantic from their emptiness. And they remember yesterday's lazy afternoon lolling around on the grass, patting their satisfied tummies.

Where is Jesus?

They wanted to make him king yesterday. Who wouldn't want a king who can do what he did? Who would give them bread and fish — as much as they could eat? Anyone who can do that from so small a beginning as a little boy's lunch, could do anything! But they didn't understand him or what he came to do.

Where is he? Where did he go? They all jump in their boats and cross over the sea to Capernaum to look for him.

Hey! There he is! When did he come here? "Teacher, when did you come here?"

How sad it must be for Jesus, who seeing their hearts, knows they just have empty bellies again. They completely missed what the miraculous picnic truly signifies. They are looking for him, not because they saw the signs and what the signs point to but because yesterday they had an all-you-can-eat miracle. They want a miracle worker.

What Jesus wants them to see is that the miracle of the barley loaves is a sign that points to who he really is. Jesus comes as the very presence of God. He is the I AM. The very One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. The very One who freed the captives from Egyptian slavery, who fed them manna in the wilderness.

After yesterday's picnic in the grass, the disciples get caught in a dangerous, late-night wind storm on the sea and something happens to tip off the first-century reader to what the sign reveals. As they strain at their oars making very little headway, suddenly there is Jesus, walking toward them on the water. They're terrified.

He speaks to them, "I AM. Don't be afraid."

Most English translations read, "It is I, don't be afraid," but that doesn't convey what's really behind the Greek phrase that wouldn't have been missed by those first readers of this Gospel. ἐγώ εμι (*e'-go ei-mi'*), I AM. It's the Greek translation of what God responded when Moses asked God's name. Anyone familiar with that story would know that Jesus is claiming the very name of God.

The writer of this Gospel puts that phrase on the lips of Jesus 21 times! ἐγώ εμι, I AM.

Jesus saying it to the disciples in the wind storm at sea is an announcement of God's very presence with them in the storm. And it's a clue to us about what the miraculous picnic is really about.

The disciples, so frantic in their fear, and the crowd, so frantic in their hunger, miss the point. And isn't that the way of us human beings? We get so busy in our desperate attempts to fill our aching emptiness, and when

we're afraid we flail around for anything to hold on to that will calm our fear. All the while missing the very presence of God, with us in our hunger, with us in the storm.

Too often we think of God like a vending machine. We come with our lists of what we want — not unreasonable wants: food and safety — we put in the appropriate coins — our works — and we get what we ask for. What we really need is God's presence in the storm. If we go back and notice, in the story about the wind storm, Jesus doesn't calm the wind or waves, but he does get the disciples through it.

And so the crowd, huddled around Jesus, remains clueless. They ask for a sign. If he shows them another miracle, they might believe in him. Believe what, though? They want more bread. The manna in the wilderness came every morning. "Give us a sign!"

"...I gave you a sign. The sign is me, standing right here in front of you. I AM." That manna in the wilderness is past tense. The true bread from heaven is present tense. It's right now, and it's on-going. It's eternal — not like the manna in the wilderness that rotted when the people tried to hoard it. This true bread that comes down from heaven gives life to the whole world. Jesus tells them, "I AM the bread of life."

He gives us this incarnate sign — the gift of bread — to hold in our hands, to take into our mouths and into our very beings so that we can experience God in a physical-flesh way. But it's way more than physical satisfaction. It's more than filling a temporal need. This is about the nourishing, sustaining, on-going, loving presence of God that we get to enjoy here, right now, and forever.

And it's not just for us. It's for the whole world. It's for hungry masses of people who don't even realize, in their aching emptiness, that they have a hunger for God. Jesus gave the barley loaves and fish to everybody; he didn't quiz them beforehand. They didn't have to earn it or qualify for it. No credentials required. He gave it. He gives it. He gives his life-giving presence to every single soul — even (and especially) when we find

ourselves rowing against the wind in the dark, fully oblivious to the fact that he's right there with us.

Finally, even the hungry crowd begins to catch on. In a gradual (though incomplete) realization that Jesus is the source of everything they need, they say, "Sir, give us this bread always!" It's reminiscent of the Samaritan woman at the well when she says, "Sir, give me this water so that I'll never be thirsty again."

There is a gradual process of discovery and awakening to who he is. And how personal and intimate his presence with us is, bread that we hold in our hands, take into our mouths and into our very beings. This is who God is!

When we awaken to our real need, our need for that intimate, loving presence, that coupling of the bread of Life with the reality of our bodies and spirits — that is the beginning of real (gradual...but real) transformation to a trust in Christ and a discovery that he carries us through every storm.

