

**July 25, 2021  
Christ the Servant, Reston  
Pentecost 9  
John 6:1-21**

**Each morning before I start my drive to church I log on to WAZE and tune in to WTOP to see if there is anything blocking my usual route which is to come down Rt. 28 and take the toll road over to Reston Parkway. I have done this hundreds of times and each time I look at the same scenery along the way and I find that scenery sparking the same thoughts day in and day out. I look at the new ugly data centers being built and think about living in the virtual cloud. I wonder who is buying those hundred-thousand-dollar cars as I pass the Lamborghini dealership. I pass by the list of Airlines close to the airport exit and dream about going to exotic places. Same scenery. Same thoughts. Day in and day out.**

**But sometimes I intentionally look away from the usual sights. I have to train myself to break out of the habit. And when I look away from the usual things I always see something I hadn't noticed before: A sign. An interesting building. A business I didn't know was there.**

**Today's gospel is sort of like my drive to work. It is the two familiar miracles – the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish and Jesus' walking on the water. I mean, when I turned to this Sunday's text I said to myself, "What?! The feeding of the 5,000 again? I just preached on that! It seems like only a month ago."**

**You have to admit that it is mighty familiar scenery. A crowd of 5,000 follows Jesus by the Sea of Galilee and gets hungry. There is no food. But a small boy comes forth with five loaves and two fish. But when the disciples distribute the food they find that, not only is there enough,**

there are leftovers. That evening the disciples start out by boat to Capernaum, but the seas become rough. Soon they see Jesus walking on the water. They call for him to get in the boat and the storm calms down.

I've been in the ministry over 40 years now. I've passed this scripture scenery many again and again. What more can be said about the feeding of the 5,000 and walking on the water?

Well, let's try doing what I do sometimes on my drive in to church. Let's turn away from the obvious things – the small boy with the fish and the loaves, the abracadabra with the food, the iconic walking on the water – and let's see what else there is which may speak to us.

Did you ever notice, for instance, that John tells us that this whole thing happened during Passover? Now, there's a verse I have been looking right past. Passover. What could be significant about that? Well, there is water and bread in the Passover story. Just as Jesus walked on water and saved his disciples from a watery death so, too, did God part the Red Sea for the children of Israel so that they could escape Pharaoh and pass through. Just as Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, God provided manna on the desert floor for the people to pick up and eat on their journey to the Promised Land.

So, what is the significance of that? Well, now it makes the feeding of the 5,000 more than a food miracle and it makes the sea story more than a water-walking miracle. Now it puts the stories in the context of *deliverance*. What was Passover all about? It was about *deliverance* from oppression in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. So, now we can see the feeding of the 5,000 as a deliverance story. Jesus, the one who can multiply fish and loaves, can *deliver* us from sin, death, and evil. And Jesus still does this with bread. When we come to the communion table

and eat of his body we are *delivered* from the dark forces which would separate us from God's love.

Here's another piece of scenery I never noticed before: The feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four gospels, but John's account is the only time we ever hear words come out of the mouths of Philip and Andrew. Their big speaking role here is to tell Jesus, basically, "We've got a problem here!" This may be of minor significance, but it does give us an opportunity to remind ourselves that this, too, is our speaking role. We need to speak the problem to Jesus: "Uh, Lord ... there are so many people on the hillside that we can't see the grass and there is absolutely nothing to eat except for this kid over here with a basket of fish and bread." When they called it to his attention, things began to happen. Isn't this is what prayer is all about ... calling things to God's attention? Glad to finally hear from you, Andrew and Philip!

Now, here's a piece of scenery we may have missed in the water-walking miracle. John tells us that, at the very moment the disciples wanted to take Jesus into the boat, *instantaneously* they reached the safe shore. That says that Jesus IS the Promised Land. The journey IS the destination. When you reach Jesus you have reached your destination. I've noticed that before and have preached on that. But what I have missed is where it says that all this happened instantaneously when the disciples *wanted* to take him into the boat. It never says he actually got in. Maybe he was still walking on the water when they reached the shore. Who knows? But the whole thing happened with *want* – with desire.

I can't tell you to want Jesus. I can only remind you how rough and threatening the sea is. But you don't need reminding. You are well aware of the storms: death, illness, the pandemic, job loss, depression. Storms. We all experience them. I can't tell you to want Jesus. *I can only remind*

*you how rough sea is.* And I can celebrate with you that it is in the *wanting* of Jesus that we arrive safely on the leeward shore.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus wasn't in the boat with them to begin with? Why had they sailed off without him? Did they expect him to walk around the sea and meet them on the other side?! Well, maybe that is a message we never noticed before. They might not have consciously thought about making sure Jesus was in the boat with them, but came to be with them nonetheless. And they didn't recognize that until they *needed* him. Then ... there he was. And the storm was calmed.

We don't need to have a crisis to come along to remember that God is with us always. God gives us bread at communion. God does water miracles at baptism. God comes to us when his word is proclaimed. God is *always* with us. WE just need to keep our heart-eyes open!