

Home Service for July 28, 2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

God, let the Word you have for us today fall upon our hearts and open us to your presence.

Call to Worship:

Holy God, joy of the universe, it is your awesome love that brings us here. You awaken within us a loving response, which hungers and thirsts for your truth and beauty. As we worship you, please do not give us the blessings we want but the ones we most need.

Opening Prayer:

Lord, we come into your presence this morning with the busy schedules of summer activities crowding our lives. Our souls need to be fed and yet we seem powerless to find nurture and feeding that will sustain us. Open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts this day to hear your words of hope and healing for us. We ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

Holy One, we come before you with contrite hearts. You know what we've done and left undone. You know who we've betrayed and excluded. Yet you love us still. We do not mean to hurt or cause harm, yet we easily cover up our wrongs. We bow before you in hope and trust that you won't push us away, but will draw us home once more into the arms of your never-failing love. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Confessions, whether spoken aloud or acknowledged silently within our hearts, are pleasing to our God. In the name of the Christ, you are forgiven.

Read Psalm 14

The fool^[a] says in his heart,
"There is no God."

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.
²The LORD looks down from heaven
on all mankind
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.
³All have turned away, all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.
⁴Do all these evildoers know nothing?
They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on the LORD.
⁵But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
for God is present in the company of the righteous.
⁶You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,
but the LORD is their refuge.
⁷Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!
When the LORD restores his people,
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

Prayers of the People:

What powerful images the scriptures present today, Lord, of Jesus feeding the thousands of people who have gathered. The Gospel lesson tells us that with the small offering of five barley loaves and two fish, he offered sustenance to the many. We wonder about this and have our doubts that such a thing could really happen in today's world. We see the big picture, the thousands of dollars that are spent on trivial things, but we do not hear about the small wonders that are performed everywhere in your name as good people reach out to those in need. Take away our blindness and our doubt. Surround us with a strong faith that, when we hear the words of healing, we may confidently know that you are in the midst of all our lives. Heal our wounded spirits. Restore in us a spirit of joy. As we have lifted names of dear ones in our prayers before you, O God, we ask your healing blessing on each of their lives and situations. We also ask your healing mercies on all areas in which there is strife, oppression, and despair. Comfort your people with your love. Empower your disciples to serve you fully in your world. We ask this in Jesus' Name, AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: 2 Samuel 11:1-15

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

² One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶ So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰ David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents,^[a] and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

¹² Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵ In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

Read the Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family^[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 6:1-21

Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year's wages^[a] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, ^[b] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Message

The Gospel of John weaves together various stories to help us come to terms with the identity of Jesus, and our relationship with him. Today we heard the story of the miraculous feeding of the five-thousand and the story of Jesus coming to the frightened disciples on the stormy sea. These stories were woven together to help us gain a deeper appreciation of the redeeming grace of God in Jesus the Christ.

The first story is the only miracle of Jesus, which is recorded in all four of the Gospels. It starts with Jesus on a hillside beside the Sea of Galilee, and this large crowd have relentlessly followed him, estimated to be about 5000 men, plus women and children. They followed Jesus because, they had seen or heard about the miracles of healing Jesus had performed to cure the sick.

So Jesus asks his disciples, “Where are we going to get enough bread to feed all of these people?” John tells us that it was Philip that responded by telling Jesus that “Six month’s wages wouldn’t buy enough bread so that everyone could just get a little to ebb their hunger.” Obviously, the disciples did not have enough money to buy bread for that crowd, even if they could have found a bakery that would have had that much bread on hand.

Then another disciple, Andrew, noticed that there was a young boy in the crowd that had come prepared with a packed lunch, which consisted of five small barley loaves, and two fish. So Andrew tells Jesus about the young man, but quickly adds, “But what good is that among so many people?”

But Jesus was not deterred. He had his disciples bid the people to sit down. Then he took that boy’s meager lunch, gave thanks to God for what he had provided, and gave the loaves and fish to the disciples to distribute among the people. And all of the people ate their fill! In fact, the disciples gathered up the leftovers, enough to fill twelve baskets. In the hands of Jesus, that boy’s meager lunch was enough to feed the crowd.

What does it mean in the context of John’s Gospel, where the miracles of Jesus are not simply recorded as having occurred, but are said to be “signs” or events that

point beyond themselves to something of deeper meaning? First, consider verse 4 of our text, when John tells us, that this event took place as the Passover was near.

The Passover is the festival in which Israel recalls God's act of deliverance from their bondage to slavery in Egypt, it is also the time in the Jewish liturgical year that was associated with the arrival of the Messiah. Also remember, that it was as the Passover was near, that Jesus entered Jerusalem with palms waving and the people shouting "Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the son of David."

Therefore, our Lord's feeding of the five thousand is a miracle that points to his identity as the Messiah; that he is the promised Christ. Even the people who ate their fill that day, recognized it as a sign that Jesus was indeed the prophet who was to come.

It was also during the Passover season that Jesus ate his last meal with his disciples, and instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion. As a result, the church has stressed throughout the years, the significance of Jesus miraculously feeding the massive crowd with just five small loaves, as a reference to his ability to nourish his church in faith, through the Eucharist.

Also, since John stipulates that the loaves of bread that the boy had brought in his lunch were made from barley, which was the food of the poor. Our conclusion can be that the crowd that gathered before Jesus that day were also poor, poor in many ways. After all, they came to Jesus with nothing. Is that not how we come to our Lord's table, with nothing to offer him, except our need to be nourished by his compassionate and redeeming grace. Like the disciples that day, we cannot understand how a few simple loaves of bread could feed such a large crowd, but when placed in the hands of Jesus, the meager loaves became the means of feeding a multitude.

Is that not what takes place in the Eucharist. Even though we still cannot understand, in the context of our worship we bring to the altar and place in our Lord's hands a simple loaf of bread and a cup of grape juice and it becomes the means by which our Lord's church throughout the ages has been fed and nourished with his redeeming grace.

When the crowd in Galilee had eaten the meal that Jesus had provided, they began to recognize that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and came to understand that they were truly in the presence of the one God had promised to send for their and our redemption.

But according to John's Gospel, that is not the end of the story. For verse 15 states, "When Jesus realized that the crowd were about to come and take him by force to

make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.” Even though the crowd that day got a glimpse of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, they failed, to truly grasp the significance of what they had experienced.

The crowd liked what they saw that day. They liked the idea that Jesus had the ability to feed them. They liked the idea that he was able to heal the sick. They thought: Let’s grab hold of him and make him our king, so that he will be obligated to meet our needs in the years to come. With him as our king, he will pull us out of this low life, and all of our needs will be met.

Knowing this, Jesus moves further up on the mountain, as his disciples went down to the sea, and got into a boat to return to the other side of the sea. But while they were out on the sea, it became dark, and a great wind arose, causing great swells in that shallow sea. In the rough water, they began to panic. They got out the oars, frantically trying to help the sail take them to the other side. Miles from shore, in either direction, they desperately feared for their lives. When they suddenly saw Jesus, walking on the roaring sea, coming toward them. They were terrified at what they saw. So, here was Jesus’ disciples, terrified, fearing for their very lives, even frightened by this figure walking toward them on the raging sea.

But then Jesus spoke to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” And when they heard his voice, they reached out to him to welcome him into their boat. And again, we behold a sign of Jesus as the Son of God. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, it immediately reached the shore to which they were headed.

What a contrast. Here were Jesus’ own disciples, terrified for their lives, and yet Jesus came to his disciples, who were in need. They were not flocking with the masses to be with Jesus, to meet their needs. Instead, he came to them, to be with them in the midst of their fear, and they welcomed him into their boat, which was in torrent. And Jesus had the ability to help them reach their destination.

We tend to think of church as where we come to be with Jesus, to obtain his benefits and blessings. But sometimes a storm arises, the sky grows dark, clouds gather, and Jesus comes out to us, lays hold of us, grabs us, and saves us?” From these two stories my understanding is that Jesus is not here to meet those needs to be entertained and feel good, but that Jesus does come to us in the midst of the storms of life that we encounter, to be with us, to walk through them with us, and to carry us to our ultimate destination, eternal life.

If we open our hearts to God’s Spirit, Jesus will come to us and walk with us, to see us to the destination that he has promised at our baptism. So, cling to your faith, for Jesus will come to you. Amen.

Let us pray: Dear heavenly Father, we come to worship with so many needs. Some among us may be ill. Some of us may be facing difficult decisions. Some may be experiencing difficulty in relationships. Yet amid all of our questions, our pains, our longings, we all have one great need: to be near you, to know your will for our lives, to love you as we ought. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to your redeeming grace in your Son, Jesus the Christ. This we ask in his holy name. Amen.

Benediction:

Beloved, receive this good news: Nothing can separate you from the love of God. May you go now in the blessing of God who forgives our sins and empowers us to turn once again to be and become who God calls us to be. Amen.