

Laetare Sunday [Lent 4] – John 6:1-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“When the people saw the [feeding of the five thousand with the five barley loaves and two fish] that He had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is come into the world!’ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.”

After the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the crowd knew that He was the long expected Prophet who had come into the world. They sought to seize him by force and make Him King. But they missed the point.

The crowd’s motives weren’t completely false. In fact, their perception was partly true. Was not this the Lord who is the King of all creation? Is He not the Eternal God in human flesh who has power over all things? Did He not prove this to be so in the miracle of feeding five thousand which He had just performed? These things are true, but there’s more to this Savior than that. The crowd took one piece of the Messiah, his power for miracles, and decided that was the chief thing.

They felt His compassion, but failed to recognize its depth. They received His kindness in taking the earthly bread, but overlooked His yearning to give them much, much more.

The crowd tried to make Him their king. But He was, after all, the King with miraculous powers who had no need of their approval or vote. The crowd's perception was not completely false. The problem was that they failed to realize that this is only one part of His role. He did not come so much to heal diseases and multiply bread and fish. He came to be a Sacrifice, to lay down His life as a ransom, to pay the price required for sin. His miracles are like ripples in the water. But they point to something greater; they foreshadow something even more miraculous. The Creator is present in His creation. It falls back into place, re-orders itself, around Him. It does this because of the Blood He will shed, because creation is also redeemed. But the people see only the miracles, only the ripples. The crowd doesn't see the Blood. They are like children playing with wrapped boxes on Christmas morning. The best is yet to come.

A peculiar detail to the Beloved Disciple’s telling of this miracle is the time reference in verse 4. “Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” The Passover would have had special significance to the crowd of five thousand that day. The Passover was the celebration of God delivering His people through eating the sacrificed lamb. Moses was the great prophet who spoke the Word of God to the people at that time. Moses spoke from the mountain and gave the people manna in the wilderness. Jesus taught the people from a mountain and fed them with manna along the way. It’s no wonder the crowd concluded, “This is indeed the Prophet who has come into the world!” Here was Moses, only greater.

Of the four Gospel writers, John is the only Gospel that has no explicit account of Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper. Those familiar words around which we gather on the Lord's Day, "Take eat this is my Body; Take drink this is my Blood" are found nowhere in all 21 chapters of the Gospel of John. It would seem impossible that the fourth Gospel writer would make so careless an oversight to the central teaching of the Christian faith. But in this chapter six of John's Gospel, which begins with the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus would say later: "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger; and whoever believes in me shall never thirst ... This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and shall not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh ... Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My Flesh is true food, and My Blood is true drink." It would be exceedingly difficult to explain our Lord's words in John chapter 6 as speaking of anything else than the Lord's Supper. The bread He gives for the life of the world is His flesh. While five thousand received the bread from the 5 barely loaves, only a few would receive the teaching of the Lord's Supper. The miraculous first gift gave way to the greater gift of forgiveness and eternal life. By eating, Adam and Eve entered into sin and eternal death. Now, by eating, the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve enter into forgiveness and eternal life. The people wanted a god of bread--but Jesus wanted to give them the bread of God.

Dearly Beloved, I want you to reflect for a minute on something wonderful God has done for you today in your life. Whether it be providing you food and clothing for this day, giving you a loving family, or even granting you safe travel and protection as you came to this place. Praise God for that. He is Lord of all created things and has had mercy on His creation by granting such things as sustain our lives. Be grateful to Him. But let's not limit the Savior to a mere bread king. He wants much more for you than that! Why settle for pleasure when you can have lasting joy? Why settle for sentiment when you can have beauty? Why settle for tolerance when you can have truth? Why settle for acceptance when you can have the forgiveness of sins?

Allow me to sum up these questions in this way: The point of Christianity is not to die and go to heaven. Shocking. The point of Christianity is not simply to die and go to heaven. Heaven already comes to you today. You have been fully forgiven and joined to the life of the Savior. Heaven is located where the Scriptures have always said it is: in the flesh and blood presence of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world on His sacrificial altar. And the Lord would have it no other way. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✱BJF✱