

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 2, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Charles Latour

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Please be seated.

Good morning.

My name is Father Charles Latour. It's again an honor and a pleasure to be here. This is where my Episcopal journey began when I was a Roman Catholic priest and John brought me on the, you know, the former Catholic Underground Railroad and brought me into the Episcopal Church.

It all began here. And it's, I spent two years working here at Trinity and then at St. Martin's, and I'm now the head of school at Christ Episcopal School. So it's always an honor to come back here.

It's amazing how our parents know us. My mother always knew when I was stressed, no matter how old I was, and I didn't even know that I was stressed because I would tend to come home or I'd be home and I don't know if you're like me, but I'd constantly go to the refrigerator and I'd open it and I'd look inside and then my mother would say, are you hungry? And I'd say, no. And then I'd grab something and I'd eat it.

I'd close the door. I'd go back and I'd eat it. And five minutes later I was coming back and my mother would again say, are you hungry? And I'd say, no, but I get something else.

And I just kept eating. And it was, my mother finally looked at me and she said, you're clearly not hungry, but you're obviously stressed. You want to talk about it.

And the fact of the matter is, my sisters and brothers, that if you're anything like me, we all come sometimes when we're hungry or stressed, rather, we use food or other things to kind of try to get rid of it. And sometimes when we're hungry, even physically hungry, and when we eat foods that don't have a lot of nutritional value, we don't feel full. The fact of the matter is we do the same thing spiritually.

We keep opening the doors of success and entertainment, of approval, possessions, constant activity. And although these things may distract us for a while, they don't sustain us. Our choice of food, whether physical or metaphorical, becomes even more spiritual, becomes even more important when we're walking through those deserts of our lives, those moments, and we all have them throughout our lives, where life seems very dark, where things are happening, and that they're just part of our lives, whether it be illness or grief, disappointment, loneliness, fear, or sometimes just uncertainty.

In those moments, we discover that whatever we've been looking for, whatever has been feeding us, whether it truly gives us strength or it doesn't. Today's gospel is a gospel we've heard many, many times, as the feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the many. Today's gospel shows us a hungry crowd in a very deserted place.

They come to Jesus because they sense that he offers what the world can't provide them. They understand that they're walking through a desert. My sisters and brothers, every life, every moment, we all have desert seasons, and in those seasons, the deeper hungers that we have have been carrying become harder to ignore.

We spend money, we spend time, attention, and emotional energy trying to satisfy that hunger. We can spend years chasing things that promise fulfillment, only to find ourselves hungry again. Now, some of those things are not bad in and of themselves.

Work is actually very rewarding. It's a good thing. Relationships can be beautiful and life-giving.

Success can be rewarding. Rest and entertainment, we all need it. The problem comes, however, when we expect or when we ask these temporary things to do what only God can do.

In other words, when we expect these things to fill a void that only God can fill. A career doesn't tell us our deepest worth. No one else can carry the full weight of our happiness or the search for that happiness.

Possessions don't give us lasting peace. And no matter how busy we are, no matter how much activity we plug into our lives, it can't heal loneliness. These desert moments reveal this all very quickly because when grief comes, when illness arrives, and plans fall apart, when fear keeps us awake at night, we discover whether what has been feeding us has actually been sustaining us.

So as we dive into this gospel, perhaps the first step is to ask ourselves, what am I expecting to satisfy me? Where do I first turn when I feel empty? What receives most of my time, attention, and my energy? And most importantly, does that truly nourish me or does it leave me wanting more? This gospel shows us that Christ begins to feed us when we stop pretending that we're not hungry. In this gospel, the crowd follows Jesus into a very deserted place. They're far from the usual sources of food and security.

Remember, there are no highways, there are no cars. These people have walked for miles. And they followed Jesus because they knew they wanted something more.

He gave them that, they saw it. They wanted it, it was almost palpable. And so they followed him and night was coming and it was a long walk back, but they stayed.

And all they wanted from Jesus was more than what they were getting in their past lives or in their lives at home. And the disciples, when they see the size of this crowd and the lateness of the hour and the shortage of food, they wonder if Jesus sees it, and he does. Jesus sees all of that.

The disciples begin to panic a little bit, but Jesus sees something more. He doesn't see the logistics. He sees the people, their faces, their needs.

He sees their weariness, their sickness. He sees the hunger beneath their hunger, and his heart is moved with compassion. That's one of the most hopeful truths in this gospel, that our needs, our wants, those insecurities that bother us and sometimes bother others, don't irritate Jesus.

Our weaknesses don't cause him to turn away. Those deserted places that we sometimes hide to are never outside his gaze. Jesus sees the person waiting for medical results.

He sees the family living with uncertainty. He sees you when you're the exhausted caretaker. He sees you when you're grieving quietly.

And most importantly, he sees the person who comes to worship right here at Trinity every Sunday, and they're carrying a burden that no one else sees. Life may sometimes pass us by, but Jesus doesn't. He sees the crowd's hunger, he sees our hunger, and his compassion will always move him to respond.

At that moment, everyone in the crowd is fed. They eat, they're satisfied, and more importantly, there's food left over. Jesus gives the crowd more than barely enough.

He just doesn't give them enough to get by. It is about abundance. Jesus gives them more and there's more left over, and that abundance of the meal points them and points us to the abundance of God's grace.

It's a symbol. It shows us that God has so much more to give us, and that abundance doesn't promise us an easy life. We'll always still face these hardships, but the promise we do have is that Christ's love for us isn't exhausted by our needs, and his presence will never come to an end halfway through this desert.

In the gospel story, Jesus places the bread in the disciples' hands to feed the crowd. He entrusts to them the work of compassion, just as he entrusts that same work to

us, sending us to nourish others with whatever we have to give. By the time the apostles see everything, they tend to be focused on these logistics, as I said.

It's a large crowd. It's turning into nighttime. They're worried about what's going to happen.

There are thousands of hungry people and almost nothing to give them. Like many of us, when we encounter those desert moments, our attention and their attention was narrowed to what could be counted, what could be measured, and more importantly, what could be controlled, because as we all know, control is an illusion. And their response is understandable, and I probably would have said the same thing, send the crowd away.

Why? What does Jesus do? Jesus just doesn't come around and say, I'll take care of it. After he breaks the bread and blesses it, he gives it to the disciples and has them pass it out. The disciples are being asked to offer what they have.

He's empowering the disciples to go out and show their compassion. He's teaching them. He's encouraging them.

He's telling them there's more than logistics. People are more than just numbers. To see who they are, that's the goal.

That's the question that many of us recognize when we sit beside someone who's suffering, because the disciples were saying, what could we do? How many times have we said that? As you train to be a priest or a minister in any mainline clergy, we all take part in something called CPE during our seminary years. That stands for clinical pastoral education. And it's always in the summer.

And the CPE summer is an intense summer, and it's kind of like this Gnostic secret you hear about in seminary, and no one really wants to talk about it until you do it. So you get assigned to a hospital. Everyone gets assigned to different hospitals throughout the United States.

There are CPE programs at most major hospitals. And when you're assigned to a hospital, you're assigned to a ward, to a part of the hospital. I was assigned to transplants and the emergency room.

And then you spend that entire summer, every day you meet with your CPE instructor, facilitator, and about the six other people that are taking this program with you all morning. And all you do every morning is break down your interactions with patients the night before. Now by nature, I'm someone who likes to fix things.

That's what I do. I'm a fixer. So CPE, those first four weeks of June were brutal because I'd be sitting in these hospital rooms surrounded by tubes and syringes, surrounded by physicians, talking to people who were waiting for a transplant, many of whom would not get it.

And I could do nothing. I couldn't fix them. And I would leave frustrated and I'd share it with the group and my CPE facilitator was a phenomenal chaplain and he used to challenge me.

He would not give me the answer. He just said, what are you going to do? And until finally in July, two weeks before the program ended, the middle of July, it kind of hit me like that. And I realized I don't have to do anything.

I'm not there to fix it. I'm there to let God fix it. My job is to be the tool that God uses.

And sometimes, most of the time, the best I could do is just be there and just sit and let that person know that I'm with them. And I just let God be God and Charlie be Charlie. And that's the best way to go.

You fast forward 20 years later, my oldest sister had been battling ovarian cancer for nine years. She passed away last March. And the last six months of my sister's life were brutal.

I fly home and I'd see her just lying in bed and she couldn't do much else. And that's where this really comes to play. Because my sister couldn't do anything and neither could I. But that CPE summer came back to me.

So we sat a lot. And I enjoyed her company and she enjoyed mine. My sister loved Downton Abbey.

My sister loved the Gilded Age. So I watched a lot of Downton Abbey and a lot of the Gilded Age. I started wearing top hats when I had nothing else to do.

But my sister loved it. And I remember seeing her a week before she died and I flew back and I knew it'd be the last time I'd see her. We watched the Gilded Age.

I held her hand. But I knew that in doing that, God was present and God was working through me and God was using me as God's instrument and I just needed to be me. And that's the ultimate thing God asks of us.

That's what this gospel is about from our perspective. Jesus did the work, but he empowered the disciples to take it out there. The disciples didn't create the food.

They didn't perform the miracles. They placed their limited offerings into the hands of Jesus. He received it and he blessed it and he used it to feed the crowd.

My brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. We have only a little time, a listening ear, perhaps an impression of God. A perfect prayer or sometimes it's just to hold a hand.

But besides all of that, there's nothing else we can do to fix the suffering, but that's enough. Because when we offer these things in love, when we offer them and entrust them to Christ, Christ can use them in ways beyond our own strength. Through these simple acts of presence, we become living signs of his compassion to someone walking through that deserted place.

At the same time, every one of us will walk through that same point. And we come back to that original question, what are we asking to feed us? And the answer lies at that table. The gospel provides a few important details about what Jesus does with the bread.

He takes it, they're very specific. He takes it, he blesses it, and he breaks it, and he gives it. These actions point all of us towards the last supper, of course, and the Eucharist where the same Christ continues to meet the hungry.

Those of us, all of us with compassion, and he gives us himself as food for this journey. In just a few moments, we all will come to this altar with our own needs, our own weariness, our own hungers. And Christ will nourish us with himself and send us out to become living signs of his compassion.

This week, I challenge you, I challenge myself, to find one person who is walking through a deserted place. You probably, we probably, won't be able to solve their problems. Perhaps all that we can offer them is our time, our prayers, to listen, or just to be present.

But if we place that small offering into the hands of Christ, Christ will change it, Christ will be present. And in our own lives, when those desert seasons come, and they will come, in those seasons, we will come to know our hunger more clearly. Yet like the crowds in today's gospel, we will also discover that God has not forgotten us, that we're not alone, and that God's grace is always more than enough and feeds us.

Amen.