

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday in Lent
John 6:1-15
March 26th, 2017

It's true that at times, legends are portrayed as truth. A story passed down from generation to generation loses its identity as either fact or fable. I mention this because the situation in our Gospel text today would have been directly affected by a story the children of Israel would have known... a story of what was thought to have happened 600 years prior. So, in order to understand what all those people on the hillside eating bread produced by the Messiah must have been thinking at that moment, you have to know the story passed down from generation to generation.

The story is about the prophet Jeremiah. It is said that before the Babylonian captivity of the children of Israel... before the Babylonians came and tore the holy city of Jerusalem to shreds... before they brought destruction upon the Temple and destroyed it, Jeremiah entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple and took out the Ark of the Covenant along with a golden vessel containing manna (bread) and hid it in a sealed cave. The manna had always been regarded as the bread from God which fed the Israelites in the desert. During the time of Jesus there was a strange rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came He would again give the manna. The giving of the manna was held to be the supreme work on the life of Moses and also the Messiah when He would finely arrive.

The belief was that the manna was hidden away until the Messiah came. In other words, when the Messiah would come to His people, this manna would be produced again. Later on in John chapter six the Jews would ask Jesus to show this miracle again... to substantiate His claim to be the Messiah. But instead of producing more bread... this Messiah Jesus would do so much more. Instead of bread, Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never hunger and he who believes in my will never thirst...*"

Jesus is much more than a bread producer... He IS the bread. He IS the life-giving meal. He is what sustains us; body and soul. Our righteousness is wrapped up in Him. And so with that, when Jesus fills the 5,000 with all that bread for their belly, Jesus shows that He is more than just a bread-king. Jesus is the Messiah, the bread from heaven, the bread that is so much more.

Yet, as we could imagine, and as we see in the text, there is so much more going on here in this miraculous story. The people are following him... why? Do they want to hear more great teaching? Do they want to see some great miracle? Do they believe that Jesus is really the Messiah, the King to come and save them? With so many people I would imagine there were many different opinions about this guy.

Today, it seems as though more people are opinionated than in the past. That's not true. Actually, there are the same amount of opinions... just more options to be opinionated about... and a greater means to express those opinions. Blogs and social media give almost everyone an outlet to share what they think. There is more news today because there is more to talk about. More issues... yes... but more stuff that is seen. We get a report from a body camera worn by a police officer that would never have been newsworthy before such things exist. We get a report on a fight that took place in the parking lot of a gas station caught on security cameras. News is automatically generated because everyone carries around a camera and can press record. All this has changed the way we hear news, get our information, formulate our opinions, and has even changed the way we think. And it's also true that we must be all the more careful on how we pass on the news... real news or fake news... in what light we are speaking of our neighbor based on what they post on Facebook... how we share what we see. Be careful, beloved in the Lord... share what is good, right, and salutary... food for the soul... a message from love and concern... not out of anger and reproach.

If Jesus were to come today and feed 5,000 plus people on a hillside, social media would be abuzz with all sorts of opinions of what this man came to do... how He did it... what all this was about. There would be 5,000 plus people with 5,000 plus opinions. I'm not sure it was any different in the days of Jesus... minus Facebook and cell phones, of course. But with these opinions, came some wonderment regarding what they learned from generation to generation. Is this the bread of Moses? Is this the manna from the Holy of Holies? What does all this mean? Who is this bread-king?

I know you run into these kind of questions about who this Jesus is today as well. Maybe you ask those questions... because life can be confusing... especially when pain and suffering persist, wars continue, and bad news outweighs the good. What kind of God do you have that would allow such terrible things? We wonder perhaps like Peter when Jesus asked Him, "*Who do people say that I am?*" Peter got it right... "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" But then Jesus would go on to tell him that He would be humiliated before the people, that He would suffer and die. Peter's faith was shaken. His opinion about Jesus suddenly changed.

Philip expressed an opinion about the work of God. Philip was tested by Jesus when He said to him in the text, "*Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?*" Philip tells Jesus that a boy has some bread and fish, "*but what are they for so many?*" It's as if Philip would say to Jesus, "There is no possible way you could feed so many with so little. No one could. It doesn't make sense."

And, it's true, it doesn't make sense. How could Jesus accomplish this task? There's not enough for so many. The thought that "It doesn't make sense," might occur when we hear these stories.

It doesn't make sense that God could love me and yet allow this suffering to come upon me. It doesn't make sense that God could be all powerful when it seems as if the devil has his way with humanity all the time. It doesn't make sense... so my opinion is, it must be different. It must be that God isn't who He says He is in the Scriptures. God isn't who we THINK He is. And this world... and, yes, we Christians begin to formulate opinions that look nothing like the truth of the Scriptures.

So, here's the truth. There is much that remains a mystery to humanity. Because we can't make sense of it, doesn't mean that it's not the truth. God's will reaches beyond what we might think makes the most sense and takes into account the bigger picture – a picture that is so big that there is no way we could see or understand it like our Lord.

So, like the legend of Jeremiah hiding the Ark of the Covenant and the manna in a cave so that those who sought to destroy the Temple could not touch them... might make sense... but it's not true. The truth is the Ark was carried off to Babylon as part of the spoils of victory. The other story sounds better, but the reality is that this sacred relic was taken.

Now, take a look at your life. In this world of all sorts of made-up stories of success and happiness, you might come to realize, that's not your story. Yours has hardship and pain. But this is what you have as well; a Lord who knows it... personally. A Lord who goes to the cross to show you that all this is temporary and that eternal life lies in your path. Our Lord comes and walks with us in suffering. He comes and shows us victory through death and resurrection like no one else. Our Lord Jesus comes to an imperfect world that has all sorts of opinions that diverge from the truth. But Jesus IS the truth in the flesh. That's what we need. That's all we need. He is not the bread-king who brings the manna back to the people. He is the LIFE-King who forgives sins, raises the dead, heals the sick, and grants salvation. There is nothing but the truth in that. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.