

8 Pentecost
July 26, 2009
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“House of Bread”

Today’s Gospel comes from the sixth chapter of St. John. In it, Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee, feeds 5000 on a mountainside, remains alone to pray, and then re-crosses the Sea to join his Apostles walking on the water.

John is writing for the churches of southern Asia Minor. On the whole he is writing for non-Jews. We know that because he explains what “the Passover” is, and the other name for the Sea of Galilee. He manages to crowd an enormous amount of material into twenty-one verses, such that we readers begin to ask: “What he is up to?”

There is a sense in which the whole of Jesus’ ministry is depicted in today’s passage. Jesus, the Messiah arrives, people follow him, because of his healing ministry to the sick. He teaches them, he feeds them. They proclaim him a prophet or more. But eventually he and his disciples are separated by storm and controversy, only for him to eventually return to them in a miraculous way. He re-assures them: “Do not be afraid” and he brings them safely to where they are going.

The storm is a story for a church in trouble. John’s church, nearing the end of the first century, is in trouble. It has been racked by betrayal and persecution. It is a church in darkness, struggling to survive the storm of hatred and death that has befallen it. Fear is the emotion that has scattered the Christians, and forced many to flee. Many have already deserted their faith and returned to the worship of the pagan Gods of the Romans.

John’s passage is a rallying cry, that strength and salvation can be found in “the breaking of bread” even if you have to leave town and meet on a lonely hillside, the Lord will feed you with spiritual food and the grace you need to endure.

“Gather up the fragments, so that nothing may be lost.” These are not just Jesus words to his disciples, but John’s words to a church that make the effort to survive, and start again in better times.

“All you see” John tells the Christians, “is darkness, but things will get better. For our Lord is no ordinary man, and he can do extraordinary things. He will bring you safe to where you seek to go.”

Today’s Gospel should remind each of us about what we too are about as a church and a mission.

We are not about the petty disputes and debates that occasionally visit us. We are about the saving grace our people need to live lives of genuine holiness, filled with courage and conviction. We are about seeking out the sick and the dying and offering to them the strength and prayer of this 'house of bread' that we call 'church.' No week, in the last year could have convinced us of that mission, when from Sloan Kettering to Lackawaxen, from Columbia Presbyterian to Scranton, the sick and ailing where in need of your prayers, your grace and your love.

What are we doing when each Sunday we step forward to receive the bread and wine at the Altar rails? Let me tell you.

We come carrying our sick, our old and our broken. We carry them in our hearts. We come forward carrying the memory of our dead, and the cherished years we spent with them. We come seeking to be re-united with parents we never wanted to be separated from. We come with our own worries, concerns, weariness and brokenness.

In receiving this bread and wine we Episcopalians seek to make all things new. Our faith tells us that Christ our Lord and Savior has made himself present in a real and spiritual way in this bread and wine, this body and blood. The transforming power of the grace we receive, we want for all we pray for, all we love, all who are too weak to come here today. In our communion our pray is surely:
"Come Lord Jesus, bind up the hurt and pain of so many; to you we lift up Melinda and Karl, Bob and Pat, Ashley and Ethel, Susan and all our dear friends. Take away the darkness. Bring them safely to shore. Fill their lives with light and the transforming power of this bread that unites us all."

"Do not be afraid" This is what we are about as a church and a ministry. We are about being a house of bread.

