

## Sermon for Proper 12 Year B

**2 Samuel 11:1-15 and Psalm 14; or 2 Kings 4:42-44 and Psalm 145: 10-19; Ephesians 3:14-21;  
John 6:1-21**

The crowd clamors after Jesus for healing. The Great Physician is healing the sick and there are many in search of his healing touch. Yet there is something more going on here than a health clinic or even a faith healing revival. The Gospel of John tells us “A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.”

Notice that John tells us the crowd “saw the signs.” In John’s gospel, miracles are signs that point beyond themselves. The miracles are not important merely because this or that person is healed or because Jesus changes water to wine and so on. The miracles are signs that point to the reality of who Jesus is by showing his mastery of creation. And so the crowd gathered for healing, but they keep following him because of the signs.

Then Jesus provides a new sign. The crowd is hungry and Jesus will feed them. He has been feeding them spiritually and now he will fill their stomachs as well. He takes the small offering of bread and fish, gives thanks for them and distributes the food to the hungry multitude. There is enough bread for twelve basketfuls of leftovers. As for the fish, we are told that everybody ate “as much as they wanted.”

This new sign points not simply to Jesus’ mastery of creation, but how with Jesus we move from scarcity to abundance. There was a lack of sufficient money or food. Philip told Jesus that there was not enough money to buy food as, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” Andrew told Jesus, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

The disciples look to the situation and see that there is not enough to go around. Why spend what little money we have when even a mound of money would not be enough? Why take the little food the boy brought when it wouldn’t be an appetizer for Jesus and the disciples, much less a meal for a multitude? Resources are scarce. When there is not enough to go around, it is not the time to share, but the time to hoard.

Jesus has a different view of the situation. Jesus operates out of abundance. Not only is there always just enough, but there is more than enough. With this hungry hoard, there is fish enough for all to get what they want and bread enough to gather together twelve basketsful of leftovers.

This is a sign that points beyond Jesus to the earlier experiences of the children of Israel. John has tipped us off that the Passover is drawing near. And at that time of year, thoughts of the Jews naturally turn toward the Exodus experience. Under Pharaoh, the people had been enslaved. The book of Genesis ends with the story of their enslavement. In times of plenty, Pharaoh hoarded the surplus produce of the fertile Nile plains. During famine, the people had been forced to give first their money, next their livestock, then their land, and finally their lives to Pharaoh in exchange for food.

The bread of Pharaoh was the bread of fear, scarcity, and slavery. Pharaoh demanded your very life and even still, there was never enough. By the time of the Exodus, the Children of Israel have long been slaves in the land of Egypt.

As the people were brought out of Egypt, they were fed in the wilderness with manna, the bread of angels. Although to get from Egypt to the Promised Land they had to cross an uninhabitable wasteland, each day God gave the people all the food they needed. There was always enough and nothing could be hoarded. The manna would rot if someone tried to store it for the next day. This was the original daily bread, a sign that God would be faithful day after day after day with enough to meet the needs. With this story in mind as well as the miraculous feeding stories of the prophet Elijah, the people gathered that day on the grassy hillside saw a new sign. They ate the bread and fish that Jesus broke and shared, and in so doing they saw the ultimate sovereign. Why bow to the Roman Caesar, or even the Jewish King Herod? With those leaders, things were hardly changed from slavery under Pharaoh. No matter which leader, the empire offered scarcity to its people and hoarded the riches in palaces the people could never enter.

But here was Jesus on the hillside, freely offering abundance. Everything the people needed for life came without cost. Jesus offered not merely free healthcare and free food. Jesus offered a change from scarcity to abundance. There would be more than enough for everyone.

John's gospel tells us, "When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

Jesus pulls back. The people have seen the sign and misinterpreted it. Jesus did not come to set up an earthly kingdom, but to inaugurate God's eternal reign.

Just after our reading for today, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." Jesus wants much more than to heal people who will later get sick again, or to feed people who will again hunger. Jesus wants to give them more. The something more Jesus offers is that to which these signs are the markers. Jesus tells them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life."

As we continue reading through John's gospel in coming weeks, Jesus will draw out the lesson of how he is the Bread of Life and will further connect what he is doing to how God fed the people in the wilderness during the time of Moses. For now, we see that the crowd wanted Jesus to be their king. This is perfectly natural. Who wouldn't want a king who fed you spiritually and bodily? Who wouldn't want a king who could heal both the body and the soul?

The multitude, satisfied by the meal, desired to always have Jesus care for their every need. And from our viewpoint twenty centuries later, we can see what the crowd that day could not see. Jesus did come to begin a reign of abundance. But his reign was and is eternal, not bound by time or place. Jesus came and gave life to those bound to the soul-killing ways of the empire where everything you have to give is never enough.

With Jesus, we offer our very lives – ourselves, our souls, and our bodies as a living sacrifice. We offer the broken places that need healing. We offer the sinful places of our lives that need repentance, forgiveness, and redemption. We offer our spiritual hunger and thirst and find spiritual food and living water in abundance.

We find in Christ the Reign of God breaking into the here and now. God knows our needs and provides strength for today and hope for tomorrow. It's what the masses wanted when they tried to make Jesus their king, and we discover that eternal reign not for an age bound in time and then gone. In giving our

lives to Jesus, we cross over from death to life, from the scarcity of an empire to the abundance of the Reign of God.

Jesus continues to give us our daily bread, and that is one commodity never in short supply.

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