



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JULY 29, 2018
2 KINGS 4:42-44; PSALM 145: 10-19; EPHESIANS 3:14-21; JOHN 6:1-21

LITTLE BECOMES MUCH

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, Lord our strength and redeemer.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning we see an individual bringing a tithe offering, the offering of the first fruit to Elisha. And Elisha in return says I want you to feed my people. *There are a hundred people there.*

Now I don't know about you, but I like to put myself into the story. Sometimes I like to think of what the characters are thinking. And I'd like to do that with today's lesson. So bear with me.

What! This isn't enough, its 20 loaves! We're not going to feed a hundred people with what I brought. Now I can be obedient because I just offered it to you Elisha, so if you want me to do it, I will. But what happens when it runs out? Who is it that the people are going to grumble to? Who is it that's going to be embarrassed that there is not enough food to go around? Who is it that will appear to be the host who didn't plan a head?

Somehow we take this precious moment of offering something to God, to the prophets, and we turn it around all of a sudden to be about us – about our own sense of inadequacy, our own sense of potential embarrassment, or difficulty or discomfort. How many times do we do that; we

plan for a celebration of some kind and more guests arrive than we plan. We worry.

And then we shift, we look the lesson in Ephesians in which Paul is crying out to God; we need to understand a couple little things here. When a proper Jewish boy or man would begin to pray, they took a position of standing; and they raised their hands. I like to imagine that perhaps they even try and appear somewhat holy and might look up. That is not at all what he did. But what Paul did was that he lay on his face. Prostrate before God. He understood the condition that he found the world... and it was a mess. It was all in chaos. He was aware that it was nation against nation; it was peoples against peoples; tribe against tribe; person against person.

And then within the individual, he noticed that inner struggle. That struggle where we didn't have that sense of balance, cohesiveness; that we didn't seem to understand that there is this possible relationship with God in which we would fully engage our mind. That we would look at things that were right; and things that

were wrong; and that we would engage with that and do something about it. And that then we would look at our very heart and soul of who we are that we would have compassion and mercy and strive for justice. That there would be a response from us that our consciences would get into play. We couldn't just let things ride.

And then there's this whole sense of that inner development, that sense of personal balance, reflection, and intimacy with God. In Old Testament times they had an understanding of God that suggested that God was unapproachable. Only the very few could have access to God. Think about the temple structure itself. There's an area only where the Gentiles could go, but no further. And the women could go a little further in, and then the men and then the priests and then the high priests.

But even then they were not confident of what God would do in the midst of the holiest of holy places. And so on those special days, that Day of Atonement, the priest would wrap a rope around his waist and enter in; knowing by the people that if he was struck down, they could pull out his dead body. But the unapproachable God, and Paul says we did not get it right – we did not understand the height, and the depth and the breadth and the width – we did not understand the vastness of the glory of God in Christ. We missed it. What we missed was this idea of intimacy.

The Greeks and the Jews and many other people of faith understood God in the paternal sense, God the father, they even used that language – God the Father. But they understood in terms of genetic material. They didn't understand it from relationship, an intimate place, it's kind of a difference in parenthood, where a mother or a father is intimately involved in the lives of their children as opposed to whose genetic material was here.

We often hear of those kinds of stories, in people's stories of adoption. *The parents I grew to love, I did not birth you, I chose you* – you hear that language and just as much as God chose us in the person of Christ and reveals himself to us, he began to realize through Paul's teaching this morning that this is about intimacy of relationship. But he doesn't stop – he said that if you're going to understand the rootedness of God in Christ, then you have to understand it is not for one people, it is not for one faith, it is not for one nation, it is for all people. If we want to come out of the chaos and the disorder that is our world; it starts in intimate relationship with one another.

Relationships rooted and grounded in Christ; rooted and grounded in that faithfulness that says you belong, I belong, we belong; and together we can do mighty things for God. That's the picture of the church that Paul is painting. That's the picture of why he threw himself onto the ground and prayed for us before God. That prayer continues, we continue to have chaos, and disorder, and nation against nation and person against person and that inter turmoil that has not ended.

In our gospel story we are told this story that is so familiar to us – the feeding of the 5,000. The notoriety of Jesus has grown and people recognize that if they have issues that need to be healed, if they need that spiritual spark – that something special that is Jesus, that they need to gather and be in his presence. That he will touch their lives, both spiritually and physically, emotionally, and so they know that Jesus and his disciples, who by the way are trying to get away from all that, they get into a boat to go across the water; from Capernaum to the Sea of Galilee is four miles.

So you'll have an idea let's just follow and get around the lake and get where they are going. We

see you Jesus. And still they follow. But when they get there Jesus recognizes not only their passion and their need, he recognizes their physical hunger. He turns to Phillip who he assumes can help him. *Phillip is a local boy – you know where to get food, can you get some?*

Are you kidding? Look at all these people. Even if we had the money, even if I knew where to go to get it, we don't have enough money to do it. Six months wages wouldn't even buy it; we'd still be short. The subtext is added, so let's do nothing. Let's ignore it and maybe they'll go away.

And then there's Andrew. *Hey! I saw a boy! The boy had six loaves of barley bread.* Now you understand barley is the cheapest bread for the poorest of the poor – which means it's not the greatest quality. But there's six loaves of it. Oh and there's two fish.

Now I know we're from the Pacific Northwest and you're probably thinking halibut – because you know after all we have big fish here. You need to change that image to two little sardines. That's probably what they were. Not necessarily sardines, but about that size, just the right size for a little boy's lunch. Six little loaves of bread and two little sardines.

Andrew says well I really don't know what you are going to do with that, I know somebody who's got some. And Jesus says to tell the people to sit down. *Okay and finally you are asking us something we know how to do. We can get the people to sit down.*

They are asking this little boy for his lunch. And he gives it to Jesus. He doesn't have very much. I remember the rector one time in one of my churches, was doing a children's sermon. And he asked the children, he brought them up into the chancel and they were sitting there, and he said how do you know that Jesus loves you? And this little girl does this [waves], gets really excited,

“I know, I know!” And so he called on her and she said, “I know in my knower that I know.”

I know in my knower that I know. Oh my gosh. We all probably could have said that when we were five like she was. What happened to us? What happened to us that began to shift us from just knowing in our hearts that things were possible – that yes, I can give you my lunch and I don't know how it's going to happen, but you can do it.

I have rooted faith you can do it. So you offer it up to that position that says well I don't know how this is going to happen, I don't think it's going to. We limit God with these attitudes and ideas of scarcity instead of the idea of the vastness of God and the full potential of what God can do if we just say yes. If we just surrender, if we just offer that little bit – that little boy didn't have very much but he was willing to give it.

Let me tell you a story about a family, it's a true story. A young girl was very ill and needed a blood transfusion. She had one of those unusual, rare antibodies in her blood and they knew she was not going to survive if she did not have this transfusion but they could not find someone with the same antibodies.

And oh they looked. Mom didn't have it, Dad, other family, relatives did not have it. And the only family member that was left was the younger son, who was only seven.

They weren't sure that he could go under hours and hours of a blood transfusion. They tried to save the daughter; and they weren't sure he could understand what this meant or the pain involved or any of that. But they had a conversation with him along with the doctor. And this little boy listened and he thought about it and his only question at the time was, if I do this, it's going to save my sister's life? And they said yes it will. And if I don't, she might not make it? Yes that's possible but she might. His parents were honest.

The little boy thought about it and thought he should do this for his sister.

And so when the day came, he asked his daddy, Daddy can you be with me in the room, I'm a little scared, and his dad said I can't because of the germs, I can't be in there with you, but I'll be watching, watching from the room and I think if you look up you will be able to see me. The doctor said you'll be awake, so I'll be there, I'll be waiting. Jesus waits for us.

The procedure had been going on for quite a while and the little boy motioned to the doctor to come over. And he said something the doctor didn't hear. So the doctor leaned way down and asked the little boy to repeat it and he said can you tell me again? He said I just want to know something and the doctor said what do you want to know? He said when am I going to die? He did not really understand that he was not sacrificing his life for his sister but that with his blood it would leave his body and enter hers and he would have blood restored. That's why it takes so long, they realized that they had missed a step, but still he had said yes.

We don't know what that little thing is or that big thing that God is asking of us. We don't know how God intends to use us for some miracle we cannot imagine. So the little boy with his lunch could not have imagined what Jesus was about to do and yet he was willing. Are we? Are we willing to look at the gifts that we have as little as they

might be. And offer those up for some potential part in some miracle we can't imagine. To feed 5000. That's what they wanted that day.

They were healed and fed and the tide turned and Jesus realized that they were about to seize him to make him their king. They didn't get it. They didn't understand who he was or why he came. And so he retired with his disciples.

We want what we can get from Jesus. We want strength when we are feeling weak. We want healing when we are ill. We want solace when we need comfort and when we are sorrowful. We want strength in our weakness. And we go to him for that and he says you have access. Come to me.

And then with his disciples as they go across and row across the lake, Jesus takes time for himself in prayer and worship and Thanksgiving before God.

That's our model. That's what he wants us to do. That's what Paul's talking about that puts us together as a whole person in Christ.

And then the disciples cry out – they're afraid and he says I'm here for you. And he helps pull them to shore, to a safe haven, gives them both strength and comfort and that's his promise for us. But I challenge you to understand today he wants something from us in return. He wants that giftedness he has blessed us with that he can create a miracle and change the world. Amen.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL