

**“More Than Sufficient”**

30 July 2006

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

**John 6:1-21**

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup>When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup>Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup>When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup>got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup>The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup>When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. <sup>20</sup>But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” <sup>21</sup>Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Prayer.

In John's Gospel, nothing is as it first appears.

There is a small detail, kind of a hidden Da Vinci style clue, nestled in our lesson

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from John. It is almost like the secret door, behind which there exist something new, wonderful, and marvelous. The Gospel author goes to great effort to camouflage it in plain sight.

The vast majority of readers of this text will carelessly read right through it and never be the wiser. The difference is as one who drives past the pyramids in a car, perhaps pulling to the side of the road to take a photograph, then driving on to their next destination; versus, the careful, methodical, organized archaeologist, who might spend twenty years searching for all the secrets that one particular pyramid might hold.

Listen and watch what happens when I reveal it to you: “Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.” (v.4)

Our Gospel lesson this morning, the first part about feeding a hungry crowd, and the second part about the disciples in a boat in a storm, is rooted in the Passover story. This seemingly innocuous phrase is the key to this entire passage.

A quick Biblical history lesson: recall the circumstances of the Passover, two thousand years before Jesus. The decedents of Abraham are held in Egyptian captivity. Moses is sent to save them. The Lord tells him to identify the house of Hebrew families by smearing the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doorway. That night the angel of death passed over the Hebrew houses and visited only the homes of Egyptians, killing all their children. The Hebrews are delivered the first time.

The Egyptian Pharaoh allows the Hebrews to leave, but has second thoughts after they are gone. While in hot pursuit he believes he has Moses trapped by the Red Sea. God works through Moses to part the water, allowing the Hebrews to pass safely to the other side. When Pharaoh attempts to cross with his army, the water rushes back in, drowning all the Egyptians. The Hebrews are delivered and saved a second time. As the Hebrews wander through the Sinai, they grow feint with hunger and thirst. God sends manna from heaven to eat, and water from a rock to drink. Again, it is God who delivers and saves.

Water and bread become very powerful symbols for deliverance and salvation. By the bread that God miraculously provided comes the gift of salvation. It is more than bread that satisfies hunger. It is bread that is all about deliverance from pain, suffering, and death in slavery in a foreign land; deliverance into a chosen place for a chosen people. Water, which was at first a barrier, a trap for the hapless Hebrews, becomes the means of an all powerful God to free them,

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to deliver them, while destroying their enemies.

Spring us forward two thousand years to Jesus in the Gospel of John. Here we find hapless Hebrews, “Jews” as they were now known, gathering in crowds to see and experience Jesus. He does miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons. “Certainly,” members of the crowds think, “if he can do these things, perhaps he is the new Abraham, the new Moses, or the new Elijah.”

Or, maybe, he is the new David, one destined to be made king? If God gives him the power to work miracles, perhaps God will give him the power to kick Rome out of the land, take the crown, and re-establish the kingdom, in all its glory, the way it was in the time of David. It was these type of expectations that grew the crowd around Jesus. They hung on every word. They watched for every sign.

It was the time of Passover. They were with Him. And they were hungry.

There is a small boy here with five loaves and two fishes (in an era before paper or plastic grocery bags, he must have had his arms full!). Certainly this is not enough to feed a crowd so large that a half year of wages wouldn't be sufficient. He sits them down, gives thanks, breaks the bread and feeds the crowds, with sufficient quantity the leftovers fill twelve baskets.

Fast forward a few years to Jesus' final hours, to the day before his crucifixion, to the upper room. It was Passover, they were with Him, and they were hungry. Jesus sits them down, gives thanks, breaks the bread and feeds his disciples ... naming the bread his “body,” and the cup his “blood.”

When we consider the Gospel of John, nothing is as it seems. We are to think beyond bread ... to Jesus, the bread of life. The bread of Passover, that saved and delivered the Jews from starvation, brings abundant sustenance to the crowds high above the Galilean valleys, is also the bread of Eucharist, that feeds every craving of the soul.

Water and bread are very powerful symbols for deliverance and salvation, deeply rooted in the Passover narrative. Water not only delivers them through the Red Sea, it also miraculously springs forth from the rock hit by Moses' stick, providing life giving water to the parched and thirsty Jews.

Spring forward two thousand years to the time of Jesus, to a passage that preceded our Gospel for this morning. Jesus goes to the Jordan River to be bap-

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tized by John. John had been baptizing the crowds with a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. The water symbolically washed their sins away.

The sinless one steps forward to be baptized. “For what possible purpose?” we ask. When up from the water Jesus is greeted with the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of God speaking from a cloud, “this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Jesus begins his public ministry, baptized by the water, blessed by a heavenly Father. Water marks the transition *from a life living in the world to a life living for the Father*.

Fast forward now to John's Gospel, when we hear in today's lesson that the disciples set off in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, to cross to the other side, under cover of darkness. The sea was rough and the wind was blowing. The disciples were rowing, it says, and they were growing afraid.

When, lo, they suddenly see ... Jesus, whom they had left behind, hiding from the Jews (less they made him king), walking on the water towards them. Now there is something you don't see everyday!

They were terrified, not unlike their descends before them, trapped in a seemingly impossible situation, facing death by water. Jesus walks over to them and the wind and the waves are stilled, saving them, delivering them from death at the hand of an all-powerful God. It was God who created the water and the air, and it is God who is able to reign it in in a moment of control, in order to work His every will and means.

Finally, fast forward to the resurrected Jesus, who, right before his ascension into heaven, looks to his disciples and instructs them to “Go into all the world. Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Teach them all that I have taught you. And lo, I will be with you to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28)

The water of Passover deliverance; life giving water to wandering Hebrews; water of our Lord's baptism; water that is stilled by the presence of our Savior; and water that is central to His great commission to all His disciples ... is the very same water as the water of our Baptism.

There you have it. Look and see the wonderful nature that had been hidden behind the camouflaged doors of scripture. Bread and Eucharist. Water and Baptism. Signs and symbols of deliverance and salvation. Our passage for this morning begs the observant to explore beneath the surface, beyond the horizon of two simple miracle narratives.

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When we consider the Gospel of John, nothing is as it seems. When we look beyond the wind tossed sea to see Jesus, we can begin to unlock the mysterious nature of the God's incarnation. When we look beneath the obvious connection between bread and hunger, we can begin to reveal the mysterious nature of God's sustaining, sufficient grace.

Bread and water. To the starving, it may seem as the very least that is necessary to maintain life. But to the faithful, water and bread are understood as Baptism and Eucharist, symbols of deliverance and salvation, God's amazing grace and continued presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

In today's Gospel, think beyond the sea. Imagine more than mere bread.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me this day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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