

## Meditative Reflections on John 6:1-21

vv1-7

Outside of the last week of Jesus' life, what we hear today is really the only story that's in all of the Gospels. It seems remarkable there's so little overlap between the four versions, or that what we hear today is judged by all four to be so important to include.

In small differences in the tellings, the other three have Jesus challenging his followers, "You give them something to eat." In this version, when asked "where will we buy bread," Philip recognizes feeding the hungry crowd would involve logistical difficulty and heavy demand (costing "six months' wages"). Not resigned to food scarcity—that there's just not enough—Philip seems to be thinking how to take responsibility to get nourishment into bellies that need it.

The author of a book I'm enjoying called *The Story of More* writes: "When we can order a pair of tennis shoes from a warehouse on the other side of the planet and have them shipped to a single address in less than twenty-four hours, don't tell me that a global food redistribution is impossible."\* It's not scarcity; our world has enough food, if we would only distribute it fairly.

So we might take the challenge to Philip as our own. BYOB Bible Study talked about miracles of sharing, with Joyce Anderson mentioning a common celebration of our MCC gardens annually extending over 5000 pounds of produce to food pantries (another 5000 to go with the Bible story's 5000!). You may picture those gardens, or walk through them after worship. Again, you may avoid eating meat at least a day a week, since making 1 pound of meat uses up 10 pounds of grain, essentially eliminating 90% of what could've fed other people, besides the other environmental problems. While the average American throws away 2/3 of a pound of food per day, 20% of what fills our landfills (*ibid*), maybe you strive to reduce garbage and waste. Maybe you donate to ELCA World Hunger, one of the best organizations as a

bang for your buck; you could even donate to match your grocery bill, as taking Philip's challenge seriously.

We'll hear next, as Rita pointed out for us, that Jesus knows even young children can help. How are you willing to meet this test from Jesus?

vv8-13

This chunk has the great big miracle, but the two things that strike me are Jesus giving thanks and the leftovers.

I continue to reference the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, a Native American practice I learned about in the book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. It offers gratitude for the sky and fish and animal siblings and the weather and teachers and so on. One section says, "With one mind, we honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans, and fruit have helped the people survive. Many other living things draw strength from them as well. We gather together in our minds all the plant foods and send them a greeting and thanks. Now our minds are one."

Gather in your mind and envision: what are the plants and the other aspects of creation for which you can send thanks today, those that have already nourished you or with which you've interacted recently? How do you practice giving thanks to God?

As you nurture that practice of mindful gratitude and prayers of thanksgiving, here's a fitting reflection from *Braiding Sweetgrass*: "You can't [be thankful] without feeling wealthy. And, while expressing gratitude seems innocent enough, it is a revolutionary idea. In a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition. Recognizing abundance rather than scarcity undermines an economy that thrives by creating unmet desires. Gratitude cultivates an ethic of fullness... [It] doesn't send you out shopping to find satisfaction; it comes as a gift rather than a commodity."\*\*

So go on and bask in the grass around Jesus, ethically full and even with leftovers, subverting

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\* *The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here*, Hope Jahren, p77

\*\* *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer, p111

the stingy empire with your contentment and gratitude.

vv14-15

This section makes me smirk. Jesus realizes the crowd wants to come and make him king. I'm not sure how he would realize it, how they could force him to be king, or even what it would mean to call him King Jesus. From what we heard a couple weeks ago, it's unlikely King Herod would take kindly to being deposed by popular demand.

At any rate, Jesus doesn't want to be king, so he says, "I'm gonna split," and hightails it to hide by himself.

Maybe Jesus doesn't want to be boxed in by titles and presumptions of roles. Even while he doesn't want to be a vending machine of signs and bread, maybe he just wants to be what you need, in feeding or your fearing (as we'll hear next). Maybe he wants to return us to a relationship of gratitude and reciprocity rather than demand.

If he doesn't want to be king, and he keeps sternly ordering people not to tell anyone that he's the Messiah, then what does Jesus want to be? Who do you say he is? How does this story or this service so far refine your view or speak to you?

vv16-21

It's a little odd that our already long Gospel reading gets stretched out for this, because it seems like a whole 'nother story or miracle. But here it is.

The disciples were terrified. I don't know if they were terrified because of the storm, which would've been perfectly reasonable, or terrified because Jesus was walking on the water—also plenty justified. Natural and supernatural fears, met by Jesus' assurance. "It is I; do not be afraid."

That assurance is offered a lot—over 15 times in the Gospels. Evidently we need to hear it.

- Jesus says it to the sick who feel risky approaching (eg Mark 5:36)
- He says it for his followers' mission (Luke 5:10)
- On Christmas in July, we remember it's announced at his birth: "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the

city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

- It's also said before his birth to each of his parents (Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:30)
- Jesus declares it against the fear of death (Luke 12:7)
- He says it before his own death: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:27)
- It's proclaimed after his resurrection, since he is going ahead of you (Matthew 28:5 & 10)

Yes, we evidently need to hear it, in the storms and strangeness we encounter. "It is I; do not be afraid."

How is he saying it to you today? Where do you need to hear it? Amid virus and variant fears? For re-encountering life? In changes you're dreading? For the future, or for the past? Because of the climate or with politics? Amid your relationships? In scarcity or sickness? For when you don't know if you can believe and trust in God's goodness? Again in the face of death and hope beyond? Natural and unnatural fears? "It is I; do not be afraid. Do not be afraid..."