

Series Title: “John’s Gospel Perspective on the Good News”

26 July 2015: 9th Sunday after Pentecost

FUMC—Arlington, TX 76011

“I’m not that kind of King”—Preaching Text: John 6:1-15

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True hope is swift, and flies with swallow’s wings;
Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings

(William Shakespeare, “King Richard III”, Act 5 scene 2).

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Hear the day’ lesson, John 6:1-15:

1 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 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?” 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” 10 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.

11 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. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 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.” 15 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 (John 6:1-15).

As this story is well known, I would like to concentrate on three things that I think John conveys by narrating this story this way. **First**, in distinction to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus is absolutely in control. Even when Jesus asks Andrew, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” John leaves no doubt about whom the master of ceremonies is for this feast. In

the next sentence, as a narrator's comment, John writes: "He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do." John's Jesus always controls the events around him. It is part of John's theological signature. As Jesus tells Pilate: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). God puts control in Jesus' hands.

Second John is the only evangelist to mention that the loaves were "barley loaves." John may have intended to bring another story to his audience's mind as they read/hear this feeding of the 5000. In 2 Kings 4:42-44 we read:

A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." [43] But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" [44] He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

John's story offers an example of a rhetorical "two stories for one," in that we hear one story, and it brings to mind another. So, when John relates a story about "five barley loaves and two fish" we also recall the prophet Elisha who fed 100 people with twenty barely loaves. And note—Elisha's quote: "They shall eat and have some left." Thus, John identifies the prophet Jesus (see verse 14) with the prophet Elisha. John subtly wants us to see the greatness of Jesus by use of one small word—"barley."

The **third** thing for us to notice in the text is the three places where Jesus says "I am the bread of life [or "that came down from heaven"]. The references are John 6:35, 6:41, and 6:48. John has prudently told the miraculous feeding of the 5000 as a prelude to Jesus' announcement that Jesus is the bread of life—all in chapter 6 following our story. We will attend to these verses in fact next Sunday.

In Exodus Moses doubts his authority and asks Yahweh "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations" (Exodus 3:13-15). When Jesus says "I am the bread

of life,” Jesus identifies himself with Israel’s God. John conveys the content and meaning of the “Good News” by the use of Jesus’ “I am” sayings. In these “I am” sayings Jesus partially reveals who he is and why he has come. In a way they are further revelations to the signs and the Christological titles John has used elsewhere. Often the “I am” sayings accompany a sign or work of the Lord. Here are the seven sayings:

- “I am the bread of life” (6:35),
- “I am the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5)
- “I am the gate” (10:7, 9)
- “I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 14)
- “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25)
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
- “I am the real vine” (15:1, 5)

Thus, John tells us Jesus is in control, Jesus’ barley loaves feed 500 times as many people as Elisha’s loaves, and that Jesus is from the “I am” of Sinai. Yet, we might be even more interested in what happens after Jesus feeds the 5000. The people want to make him king—no small yearning in a little outpost ruled by the powerful Roman Empire. And if Jesus was a normal person, we might think Jesus would be pleased about this turn of events. After all, we admire people who can draw a big crowd and deliver big time promises.

Yet, Jesus is obviously less than content by all this royal attention. Jesus no doubt has troubled thoughts at the crowd’s suggestion. He after all has have a spiritual experience in the wilderness. We all remember Satan’s temptation for Jesus to turn the stone into bread? The temptation was not just appealing to the hunger Jesus felt in the wilderness—it was a temptation to substitute human being’s material needs for spiritual ones. Jesus know well that when a mob makes you King then the mob tries to control. And as we know, John’s Jesus always controls the events around him. The crowd or mob want Jesus as king because of what Jesus can do for them.