

John 6:1-21

Jesus asks Philip where they will find food to feed a large crowd. Philip says it would be far too costly to try and feed them all. Then Andrew points out someone has 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus blesses the food and it is distributed to the crowd. Everyone is fed. Because he knows they want to force him to be king, Jesus withdraws. Later, as the disciples sail across the lake, a storm comes up. Jesus crosses the water to meet them and they arrive safely.

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 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. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 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?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 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. 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 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."

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. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 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. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

COCU 49 B Readings

This week's readings offer us a startling contrast. On the one hand, there are the familiar stories of God's provision. Jesus feeds a large crowd – possibly because the generosity and faith of one small boy led to greater sharing and mutual care from the entire group. As the disciples wrestle in the storm, their fear is removed when they know the presence of Jesus, and they are able to find their way back to land safely. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds the believers of God's provision and grace, and prays that they may learn to grasp how abundant God's love is, and that they allow this knowledge to strengthen them and open them to God's life within them.

On the other hand, there is the story of David's lust and deception. The infamous story of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband speaks loudly of the consequences that result when we move away from trust in God's grace and God's ways, and begin to operate from our own self-interest. Although God had given David everything he could have desired, in his unfaithfulness and selfishness, it was not enough, and so he took things into his own hands and brought tragedy on others and (as we will see next week) himself.

The focus this week is on learning to trust in God's grace and God's ways, and learning to live out of that faith in every choice, every decision and every moment. It's a timely word, since so much suffering is caused when we operate from fear, lust, greed and self-sufficiency. Faith in God's ways and God's gracious presence may sound naive and impractical, but, when we take the risk and live as faithful followers of Christ, we discover that the principles of God's Reign really are the best way to live.

The Gospel narrative may be interpreted miraculously or not, but either way the principle remains: the miracle of God's Reign is that we begin to believe that we can feed crowds, we can navigate storms, and we can discover ways to live that liberate us from the prisons of our own self-interest, lust, and self-sufficiency. The key challenge this week, then, is to risk believing in God's Reign enough that we embrace its values as the primary driving force of our lives, and as the guiding principle for addressing the crises of our times.

When the values of God's Reign are brought into play, we can truly believe in a different way, which often leads to surprising solutions to our problems. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Psalm 14

Those who are foolish and wicked say that there is no God, and God sees how society has become corrupt. But, God is with the righteous who are "eaten up" by the wicked, and will save Israel, leading the people to rejoice.

Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds.

There is no one who does good.

The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind

to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God.

They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse.

There is no one who does good, no, not one.

Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers,

who eat up my people as they eat bread,

and do not call upon the Lord?

There they shall be in great terror,

for God is with the company of the righteous.

You would confound the plans of the poor,

but the Lord is their refuge.

O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

2 Samuel 11:1-15

After David sees Bathsheba bathing, he sleeps with her and she becomes pregnant. Then, he summons her husband, Uriah, who is away at war, and attempts to get him to sleep with his wife to cover David's adultery, but when Uriah refuses, out of loyalty to his fellow soldiers, David commands that he be left stranded on the battlefield so that he will be killed.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am

pregnant." So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul prayer is that God, who knows all people, will strengthen the Christians in Ephesus, live in them and enable them to grasp the height, depth and breadth of God's love. God can do far more than we can think or imagine.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.