

NINE PENTACOST 7-25-21

2 KINGS 4:42-44 PSALM 145 10-19 EPHESIANS 3 14-21

JOHN 6 1-21

GOOD MORNING

TODAY'S READINGS AND GOSPEL LEAD ME TO CALL THIS LOAVES & FISHES SUNDAY. ALL ABOUT GOD MEETING OUR NEEDS, ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS BELIEVE!

A CERTAIN MAN BROUGHT TO ELISHA A PORTION OF THE FIRST FRUITS OF HIS LAND. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THIS WAS AN OFFERING OVER AND ABOVE THAT REQUIRED BY LAW, BUT EITHER WAY THIS WAS A TOKEN OF GOOD STEWARSHIP ON THE PART OF THE UNKNOWN MAN. ELISHA, LIKE JESUS AFTER HIM, "GIVE UNTO THE PEOPLE, THAT THEY MAY EAT," COMMANDED THE MAN OF GOD. ELISHA'S SERVANT SERVED AS A FOIL TO HIS MASTER, HIGHLIGHTING THE APPARENT IMPOSSIBILITY OF WHAT ELISHA WAS COMMANDING. YET WITH GOD, WE ARE CONSTANTLY REMINDED, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. "GIVE IT TO THEM", REITERATED ELISHA. AFTER ALL, THE LORD HAD SAID THAT THE TABLE WOULD BE FURNISHED, ALL WOULD EAT, AND

THERE WOULD BE SOME LEFT OVER. ELISHA WAS SPEAKING IN FAITH, AND EXPECTED THOSE WHO HEARD THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM HIM TO OBEY. NOT ALL UNDERSTOOD.

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED THE WAY THAT JOHN WEAVES TOGETHER VARIOUS STORIES TO HELP US COME TO TERMS WITH THE IDENTITY OF JESUS, AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. I AM SO GLAD THAT OUR GOSPEL LESSON FOR THIS MORNING DOES NOT END WITH THE STORY OF THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF THE FIVE-THOUSAND, BUT GOES ON TO INCLUDE THE STORY OF JESUS COMING TO THE FRIGHTENED DISCIPLES ON THE STORMY SEA. A TWO FOR ONE STORY THAT WEAVES TOGETHER TO HELP US GAIN A DEEPER APPRECIATION OF THE REDEEMING GRACE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.

FIRST, LET'S CONSIDER WHAT IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR STORIES IN THE LIFE OF JESUS, JOHN TELLS US THAT JESUS CROSSES THE SEA OF GALILEE, BUT A LARGE CROWD KEPT FOLLOWING HIM, BECAUSE THEY SAW THE SIGNS THAT HE WAS DOING FOR THE SICK. ACCORDING TO JOHN "SIGNS" IS THE WORD THAT HE USES

TO REFER TO JESUS' MIRACLES. WHEN JESUS SEES, THE CROWD, HE GOES UP A MOUNTAIN WITH HIS DISCIPLES, AND SITS DOWN, PERHAPS FOR A BRIEF REST. BUT SOON HE LOOKS UP, AND SEES THIS HUGE CROWD COMING TOWARD HIM. AND ACCOURDING TO THE AUTHOR, THE FIRST THING JESUS DOES, EVEN BEFORE THE CROWD ARRIVES, IS TO ASK PHILLIP, "WHERE ARE WE TO BUY BREAD FOR ALL THESE PEOPLE TO EAT?" UNKNOWN TO PHILLIP THIS IS A TEST – HE ALREADY KNOWS THE ANSWER. INDEED A SET-UP FOR FAILURE. THEY WERE ON THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN, A RATHER DESERTED PLACE – NOT A BAKERY IN SIGHT. JESUS ASKS "WHERE?" PHILLIP RESPONDS "SIX MONTHS WAGES COULD NOT BE ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY BREAD FOR ALL OF THEM, EVEN A LITTLE TO TIDE THEM OVER."SEEMS LIKE PHILLIP IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE COST, THAN WHERE. BUT THEN, ANDREW POPS IN AND TELLS ABOUT THE BOY AND HIS LUNCH (FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISHES) AND THERE IS NO NEED TO TELL THE REST OF THE STORY – (WE PROBABLY HAVE IT MEMORIZED!)

BUT ACCORDING TO JOHN'S GOSPEL, THAT IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY. IN VERSE 15 JOHN ADDS "WHEN JESUS REALIZED THAT THEY (THE CROWD) WERE ABOUT TO COME AND TAKE HIM BY FORCE TO MAKE HIM KING, HE WITHDREW AGAIN TO THE MOUNTAIN BY HIMSELF" THE CROWD FAILED TO GRASP THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT THEY HAD EXPERIENCED. IN ESSENCE, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SUM UP THIS KEY VERSE, WHICH MAKES THE TRANSITION INTO OUR NEXT STORY, WITH THIS THOUGHT. THE CROWD LIKED WHAT THEY SAW THAT DAY – LIKED THE IDEA THAT JESUS HAD THE ABILITY TO FEED THEM – LIKED THE IDEA THAT HE WAS ABLE TO HEAL THE SICK – LET'S GRAB HIM AND MAKE HIM OUR KING, SO THAT HE WILL BE OBLIGATED TO MEET OUR NEEDS IN THE YEARS TO COME... MUCH AS TODAY'S CONSUMER ORIENTATED SOCIETY.

THE SECOND PART OF THE STORY, WHILE JESUS GOES FURTHER UP INTO THE MOUNTAINS, THE DISCIPLES GO DOWN TO THE SEA, AND GET INTO A BOAT TO RETURN TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE, SINCE JESUS REALLY WANTED TO BE ALONE. WHILE THEY WERE OUT ON THE

LAKE, IT BECAME DARK, AND A GREAT WIND AROSE, CAUSING GREAT SWELLS IN THAT SHALLOW LAKE, SUCH AS THOSE THAT COME UP ON OUR OWN LAKE MEAD – I CAN TELL YOU I HAVE PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED THAT AND WAS TRULY AFRAID WE WERE NOT GOING TO MAKE SHORE. IN THE ROUGH WATER, THEY BEGAN TO PANIC. THEY GOT OUT THE OARS, FRANTICALLY TRYING TO HELP THE SAIL TAKE THEM TO THE OTHER SIDE. MILES FROM SHORE, IN EITHER DIRECTION, THEY DESPARATELY FEARED FOR THEIR LIVES. AND IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH TO SEND THEIR BLOOD PRESSURE TO THE LIMIT, THEY SUDDENLY SAW JESUS WALKING ON THE ROARING SEA, COMING TOWARD THEM. ISN'T THAT QUITE A DIFFERENT PICTURE OF WHAT JOHN HAS PAINTED FOR US IN THE FEEDING OF THE HUGE CROWD. THEY WERE HAPPY, JESUS WAS TO BE KING, NO WORRIES. BUT HERE WAS JESUS' DISCIPLES, TERRIFIED, FEARING FOR THEIR OWN LIVES, EVEN FRIGHTENED BY THIS FIGURE WALKING TOWARD THEM ON THE RAGING SEA. BUT THEN JESUS SPOKE TO THEM. HE SAID "IT IS I; DO NOT BE AFRAID." AMD WHEN THEY HEARD HIS VOICE, THEY

REACHED OUT TO HIM TO WELCOME HIM INTO THEIR BOAT. AND AGAIN, WE SEE A SIGN OF JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD. AS SOON AS JESUS GOT INTO THE BOAT, IT IMMEDIATELY CALMED THE SEA AND THEY REACHED SHORE.

AS WILLIAM H WILLIMON STATES IN HIS COMMENTARY ON OUR TEXT, AND I QUOTE, "IN MY CHURCH THESE DAYS, WE HAVE AN ALMOST EXCLUSIVE FOCUS UPON JESUS AS THE ONE WHO FEEDS, LOVES, AND HEALS, AND AN ALMOST COMPLETE NEGLECT OF JESUS AS THE ONE WHO SAVES.

IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT FROM READING THESE TWO STORIES THAT JOHN WOVE TOGETHER THAT JESUS FLEES FROM OUR DESIRE TO SEIZE HIM TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED, EXPECIALLY THOSE NEEDS TO BE ENTERTAINED AND FEEL GOOD, BUT FROM THESE TWO LESSONS, I DEFINITELY BELIEVE THAT JESUS DOES COME TO US IN THE MIDST OF THE STORMS OF LIFE THAT WE ENCOUNTER, TO BE WITH US, TO WALK THROUGH THEM WITH US, AND TO CARRY US TO OUR ULTIMATE DESTINATION. SO I REMIND YOU TO CLING TO THE FAITH, FOR JESUS WILL COME TO YOU. AMEN

