

The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

“Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”

(John 6:1-15)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

John Heywood was a singer, musician and a playwright in the court of King Henry VIII of England in the 1550's and is the source of many a phrase that we still use today. I'm guessing that you have either used or heard some of them: “many hands make light work,” “Rome wasn't built in a day,” “don't look a gift horse in the mouth,” as well as the saying that got me looking up all this on the internet, “beggars can't be choosers.”

“Beggars can't be choosers,” our theme for this morning, is a phrase that applies so often in life, and is one I've often said from time to time. Even the Bible has some great examples of “beggars can't be choosers” or it's sister phrase “don't look a gift horse in the mouth.” God gave Adam and Eve all the trees in the Garden of Eden, save one. So which one did they just have to pick from? The Israelites complained and complained about having nothing to eat in the desert. So God gave them manna each

morning and quail each evening for them to eat...yet, that wasn't good enough for them. The problem wasn't with the food, but with the eaters. It wasn't a problem with their mouths, but with their eyes...the way they saw their food. They were beggars who wanted to be picky and choose, and they weren't happy with the gift horse that was given to them.

Today, in our Gospel reading, we saw another situation where these two phrases could definitely come into play. When Jesus fed the 5,000, He didn't just want to give people bread and fish, He wanted to give them more—a different kind of bread. Instead of seeing Jesus as simply a giver of bread, He wanted them to see Him as a Giver of forgiveness, their Savior from sin. Jesus knows our needs, and He actually gives us more than we need. All we have to do is look and see and believe.

The feeding of the 5,000 is one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. All four Gospel writers record this great miracle in their books. We often see this miracle as a great act of charity toward those in need, but Jesus also wanted to use this miracle to teach his disciples a powerful truth.

Jesus knew the hearts within this crowd of people. This wasn't thousands of disciples following him around the top of the Sea of Galilee. They were only following Him because of His miracles. So many weren't there for Jesus' words; they were only there for the show.

At this point in His ministry, Jesus wasn't getting much "alone time" to teach His disciples, so He used the situation as an opportunity to teach them. So He asked Philip, "*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*" John writing years later then adds the aside, "*He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*" In order to teach Philip, Jesus lets Philip and the other disciples think about and discuss the problem. So, Philip does some mental calculating and he comes to the conclusion that they can't afford it. Andrew starts asking around and finds a boy with five loaves and two fish.

Both men come up empty. Their best thoughts at solving the problem are unsatisfactory. They were thinking small, and they weren't involving God in their thinking process. They needed to learn to do that.

So...Jesus takes the little boy's bread and fish, thanks His Father in heaven for the wonderful gift, and has it distributed to the thousands of people sitting in front of Him...and it simply never runs out. They all have their fill and there's even leftovers...12 baskets...a basket for each of the 12 disciples.

While the impact of the teaching lesson was learned mainly by the disciples, it was not totally lost on the crowd. They saw Jesus as the

fulfillment of a prophecy—that a greater Prophet than Moses would come. The problem was that they still weren't seeing all that well. Their taste buds were getting in the way, and saw Jesus as the wrong kind of bread-giver. They wanted Jesus to open a free bakery where everything was free of charge. They weren't seeing Him as the One who truly was "the Bread of Life," as He soon would teach them...a teaching that they would also reject. The beggars wanted to choose, and they did look a gift horse in the mouth.

Jesus wants us to worship and glorify Him for the RIGHT reasons. He deserves all the glory for who He really is—the Son of God who was sent to save us. Refusing to be the people's bread king, John tells us that after the people had been fed and intended to "*make Him king by force,*" Jesus "*withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*"

The question we must ask ourselves is: Who are we like? Are we like the disciples who don't take God into consideration as we think about the various problems that come into our lives—come up with our seemingly impossible solutions and give up? Or might we be like the crowd whose eyes are focused on the wrong things in life and totally miss out on Jesus and what He truly has done for us?

Each one of us has been and probably will be tested by Jesus just like He tested Philip and Andrew and the rest of the disciples. Jesus knows exactly what He will do to solve our problem, but He tests us to teach us and help us grow. So often, as we wrestle with a problem, something happens that we never took into consideration to turn things around. And the problem ends up with a great blessing from God coming our way.

The lesson to be learned is that Jesus does know better. He knows better than us what we truly need, and He knows better than us how to supply us with what we need. Think of how much time and effort we give to thinking a problem. We come up with 2-3-5-10 possibilities, think about how we will respond, and then none of them happen. God had it happen a totally different way, and often with a much better solution—with leftovers.

Yet, it's difficult to kick the habit of thinking that we can provide for ourselves better than God. Living together outside of marriage is a great example of this: people have a need, and come to their own reasons why it's good for them, without consulting God. Another might be: working long hours to provide for a family while neglecting that very same family in the meantime.

The truth is that often, when problems arise, we're afraid to trust that Jesus will provide for us, so we don't walk in His ways and do His will. But ask around, I'm sure quite a few of you have beautiful stories of how you

did trust in God and He blessed you and gave you even more than you dreamed of.

Unfortunately, it is a part of our sinful nature to think that we know better than Jesus: we justify our sinful ways and actions giving this excuse that we HAVE to do it OUR way, and that there is no other. But the truth is that the devil loves short-term solutions for long-term problems, short-term pleasures in exchange for long-term pain.

But Jesus knows better, and He knows how to supply the real help. And that is quite evident in the help He has provided for our problem of sin.

Think of it...how many people do you know who are really concerned about their sins...that they are not right in the eyes of God? Not too many, right? They're OK in their own eyes. They just need help here and there...with a job, with their health, with a friendship, or with a family member, but with sin? Nah. Yet, this is our biggest problem, and Jesus took care of it, once for all, by giving His life on the cross and paying for our sins.

Those of you who took Catechism in the 7th and 8th Grades once had to memorize some very important words, proud words about our church and our God: "In THIS CHRISTIAN CHURCH, He daily and richly FORGIVES ALL SINS to ME and all believers. Jesus knows our greatest need, and gives us the greatest answer and solution--through the Church.

As Jesus gave thanks to the Father for the bread and fish He supplied, let us give thanks to the Father for the forgiveness and the Savior He has provided for us. This blessing is greater than any other blessing He might give us. Jesus gave us Himself.

Satisfaction in life is really about seeing clearly what we need in life. And when we clearly see what we need, we find that the Lord our God has given us much more. So the next time we find ourselves "not satisfied," let's not turn to words or actions that God would disapprove of. Instead, let's put the matter in His hands, find how He would like us to act and do, and allow Him to provide in His own way and time. Jesus knows us and our needs better, and He supplies even more. Amen.