



First United Church of Oak Park

The Feast of Christ's Abundance

John 6: 25-35

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August 1, 2021

The four gospels are quite different from one another. The gospel of Mark begins when Jesus begins his ministry, as an adult. Matthew and Luke go further back, telling the stories of Jesus' birth — though not in the same way. The gospel of John goes further back still, back to before the creation of the world. So, yeah, the four gospels vary a lot in what they focus on. The gospel authors don't include everything that could be said about Jesus, don't tell every story that could be told. The gospel of John enigmatically ends by saying that the world is not large enough to fit all the books of the stories of all that Jesus did.

But one thing that all four gospels share in common is the story of Jesus feeding a multitude of people with just a little bit of bread.

Each of the gospels includes this story, sometimes more than once. The gospel authors each really want people to know about this story about bread. The authors want us to know the story. Thousands of people were gathered around Jesus, and they needed something to eat. But the disciples had only a very little food. The disciples did not want to feed everyone for the very legitimate reason that it would be impossible. Of course, the rest is well known: Jesus breaks the bread and blesses it and tells the disciples to serve it to those gathered. And somehow just a few loaves of bread feeds five thousand people. It was a feast of Christ's abundance.

And here, we see the gospel of John talking about what happened after Jesus fed the multitude with just a bit of bread. Unsurprisingly, the people who had experienced this marvel came and wanted to talk with Jesus. They had questions that they wanted to ask him.

And from the questions that the crowd asks, it is clear that these are not dyed-in-the-wool disciples of Jesus. They barely knew anything about him. Their questions were things like "When did you arrive in this region?" and "Tell us what it is that you are trying to accomplish." These were not people devoted to following Jesus' new way. The ones who were fed at the feast of Christ's abundance barely knew anything about

him. And question by question, answer by answer, Jesus teaches the crowd, telling them at the end, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.”

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.” That is all that is needed to have a seat at the feast of Christ’s abundance, merely that they should arrive at the feast. A person does not need to be perfectly righteous, or even particularly righteous. They must simply arrive at the feast. A person does not need to have an exhaustive knowledge of the faith, or even know answers to questions such as “What was Jesus trying to accomplish?” All they must do is arrive at the feast, and they would be fed at Christ’s own hand.

I am a pretty firm proponent of the practice of open communion. That is, the practice of welcoming all who would come to the table a place at the feast. There are many parts of the Christian Church that do not practice open communion, and there are legitimate reasons for that. Some would say only those who are baptized should take communion because communion is reserved only for Christians. I can understand that — it’s a legitimate reason. Others would say only those who have confessed and been absolved of their sins should take communion, because it is a holy thing and those seeking a holy encounter with God ought to at least attempt to be in good standing before the Lord. I understand that, too.

But I think back to the story of the feeding of the multitude, and I think back to the part the disciples played. The part the disciples played was they tried to turn people away and for an exceptionally legitimate reason, namely, it would have been impossible to feed 5,000 with just a few loaves. But Jesus tells the disciples that it is not their feast, but his own. They are only to serve, and in serving at the feast of Christ’s abundance everyone was fed — even the disciples.

Whenever I consider whether there ought to be some limits to who can be served communion, I remember the disciples. “This is literally impossible,” the disciples said, and Jesus made a way for all to be fed. Whatever my reasons might be, they are not as weighty as literal impossibility. The communion table is a feast of Christ’s abundance, and Christ’s words ring out from before the creation of the world to the end of all things — “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.” As disciples of Jesus, this is not our feast, to control who may and may not attend. Ours is merely to serve, to break the bread and feed all whose spirits hunger for Christ. And in breaking the bread, and giving it away, at the feast of Christ’s abundance, everyone will be fed. Even me, even you. Thanks be to God.