

Sermon – John 6:1-21; Ephesians 3:14-21
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
Pentecost 10 – Year B
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“Full”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I know what you're thinking: It sure has been a long time since Pastor Lyle mentioned *Star Wars* in a sermon. And you're right! As a matter of fact, it's been 532 days, which is no doubt some sort of record during my twenty years of ministry. But your patience has paid off, because today's gospel reading, set on a hillside in Galilee, carries me far, far away to planet Dagobah. It is there that young Luke meets master Yoda; it is there that Luke's X-wing Starfighter sinks into the swamp. Yoda, teaching Luke the ways of the Force, encourages his pupil to lift the spaceship out of the waters, using only his mind's connection to the mystical. Luke knows it's impossible but offers to give it a try. To which Yoda replies, "Do. Or do not. There is no try." For Luke, it is a question of if. For his master, it is a question of how.
2. Back on earth, we discover the a different master with his students, both the inner circle of the Twelve and the multitudes in their thousands. They have followed Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, seeking after this One who has worked signs and wonders in their midst. In their eagerness, they forget to bring lunch. Jesus, so good at seeing the needs of those around him, pulls Philip aside and asks, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" You'll note, first, that Jesus doesn't blame the crowds for their failure to pack food. He doesn't blame the hungry for being hungry. He makes it a problem for himself and his disciples. And second, you'll note his question. It

is not a question of if, but how. Not, “can we find food for these people in their thousands,” but “how and where shall we find food?” Andrew is somewhat more optimistic than Philip, but not by much: Yes, there is a little food here, but not nearly enough. We could try, but it is impossible. Impossible, perhaps, for them. For us. But not for Jesus. Jesus already knows what he’s going to do.

3. The miracle, or sign, that follows is recorded by all four evangelists. Taking the boy’s five loaves and two fish, Jesus makes enough to feed them all. With leftovers! Their hunger, at least physically, is sated. They have had, finally, enough. What next? The crowds, sensing perhaps that their ship has come in, want to make Jesus king. But whatever sort of reign Jesus has come to enact, it will not be based on the old Roman model of bread and circuses. Jesus is not self-aggrandizing. He’s not even aggrandizing. So, he escapes the crowds. The disciples go, too, making their way back across the sea. Jesus comes to them in the darkness, walking across the water. They, too, try to claim him as their own and take him into their boat. But Jesus will not be domesticated. He goes on ahead, drawing them after him. What does it all mean?
4. In an answer that will be fleshed out, quite literally, over the coming weeks, Jesus tells the disciples in the boat, “I Am.” Our translation renders it, “It is I,” but that’s not what Jesus says. “I Am,” Jesus declares, proclaiming that the One standing on the waves is the same One before whom Moses stood at the burning bush. Jesus is God incarnate, the Lord of heaven come down to earth. The One who gave the people manna in the desert now come to be our daily bread. Not simply to feed us with all that we need, though God surely does that. But to be the bread that finally satisfies. And when this God shows up, the question is now “if,” but “how?”
5. So, Jesus puts Philip and the others to the test. How will we feed the crowds? It is, perhaps, uncomfortable to think about Jesus testing us. Will we fail? And

when we do, as we surely will, what does that mean? Or is Jesus after something else here? In his short story, “The Bootlegger,” Amor Towles’s New York narrator, a classical music neophyte, finds herself in Carnegie Hall, listening to the prelude to Bach’s first cello suite. As the music nears its climax, it begins to climb. But as the narrator notes, “the word *climb* isn’t quite right. For it wasn’t a matter of reaching one hand over the other and pulling oneself up with the occasional anxious glance at the ground. Rather than climbing it was . . . it was . . . it was the opposite of cascading—a fluid and effortless tumbling upward. An ascension.” On this day when the church commemorates Bach, we know that he was not simply a musical wonder-worker. He was the fifth evangelist, whose music so sturdily proclaims the gospel. And the gospel is not about passing tests or pulling ourselves up, by bootstraps or otherwise. The gospel is about falling upward in the inverted gravity of God’s grace, into the fullness of the One who offers himself as the Bread of Life. Seeing the sin and brokenness of this world, Jesus doesn’t ask if, but how. How can we be saved? The answer is for the I Am to give himself freely, that we may be fully fed. Jesus test us not to see if we will make it, but because we already have, and he pushes us now forward, that we would be the ones through whom God’s “how” is at work in the world. In Christ we do not try. We do. For the sake of this hungry world, we do. Through Harmony’s food pantry and through Lutheran World Relief and in so many other ways, we refuse to believe that this world’s question of hunger is an impossible one to answer. We won’t just try, church, for Christ can do all things through us.

6. We can only do this work because of what Christ has freely done for us. When our kids were younger and, to be honest, even now, the end of mealtime brought the hope of dessert. We’d look at their plates, which might still have lingering vegetables or other less desirable things. “We’re full,” they’d protest. How, then, we might ask, could they eat dessert? Oh, they’d offer knowingly, our *food holes* are full, but there’s still room in our *dessert holes*. While such an argument wouldn’t work in science class, it was usually

enough for us. We, too, have a space that can only be filled in one way. We can fill our lives with so much, good or bad, selfishly or in service to others, but there remains a space in us that can only be satisfied by Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. French philosopher Simone Weil put it this way: "The soul is unconsciously engaged in searching for God." There on a hillside in Galilee, and here on God's table of grace, the search reaches its conclusion. Here is Christ, broken for and given to you. Here our restless hearts, to echo Augustine, finally find their rest in him. Here our emptiness is sated, not just with enough, but with God's full abundance. Come and eat! And from here go and do. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.