

“Why Are You Here? What Are You Looking For?”

John 6:22-35

It is the 11th Sunday after Pentecost and we have been following Jesus and the disciples through the account of Mark's Gospel. Today, we continue with the same narrative, however we shift over to John's Gospel and will be in John's Gospel for three weeks.

We have seen Jesus feed the great crowd, 5000 men plus the women and children, with what was essentially “bread from heaven” although He started with five small loaves and two fish. My favorite church name of all time is the church there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee built to commemorate that event: “The Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes.” “Our Redeemer” is a great name for a church, but . . .

So then we hear of how Jesus sent His disciples in a boat to the other side of lake, while Jesus remained and dismissed the crowd. John picks up the narrative and the next day, the crowd noticed that there had only been one boat, which Jesus did not get into with the disciples, but He still got to the other side of the lake.

We heard last week how He got there. Jesus was in the same boat as the disciples, He just didn't get into the boat until He walked on the water out to where the disciples were. When the crowd finds Him, they want to know how He got there. Jesus doesn't answer them, but rather He calls them out for their hypocrisy.

They aren't looking to Him as the Messiah promised of old. They aren't looking for Him to be the suffering servant of which Isaiah wrote. They aren't looking at the signs and miracles being the confirmation that He is the one who would save all the children of Adam from the guilt of the sin of Adam. He calls them out and says, "You are only here because you want another free fish sandwich." That may not be exactly what He said, but that was the sentiment.

Why are you here? What are you looking for? Why did you make the effort today to come to a place called "Our Redeemer"? Do you actually want to be here, or would you actually rather be somewhere else right now?

Your honest answers to those questions would speak volumes about your faith and your actual relationship with your Creator and Redeemer. Why are you here? The crowd was seeking out Jesus because they wanted to make Him their "Bread King."

In today's world, we would call this the "Prosperity Gospel," but it has been around for a long time in one form or another. Three weeks ago, we heard in our Old Testament reading from Amos 7 that Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, told Amos to go away and preach somewhere else because all he ever had was bad news. Amos came and said, "Israel shall be laid waste." Amaziah would be the charismatic TV preacher today who prophesied nothing but good news and prosperity for King Jereboam and all of Israel. He would say something to the effect: "God makes sure that you are always blessed in abundance." (And yes, that is a direct quote

from a current very popular TV preacher. It took me three seconds to find it online).

In the Middle Ages and certainly in the days of Luther and even into the Renaissance, there were many men who were entering into the monastery as a means of keeping their bellies filled and spending their days brewing beer. Friar Tuck, in the story of Robin Hood, is the classic “fat Friar” who did his work in and around many peasants who were skin and bone. Martin Luther wrote viciously against the monks and other “churchmen” calling into question their reason for seeking out a life within the church.

“Why are you here? And “What are you looking for?” are questions Luther would have posed to every monk of his day. You could make a strong case that Luther as a monk struggled with answering those questions for himself. And the Lord led him to rediscover the heart of the Gospel being salvation in Christ by grace through faith alone – apart from works, lest any man should boast, as St. Paul says.

“Why are you here? And “What are you looking for?” The crowd in Jesus’ day was looking for free food. They wanted something to fill their belly. Jesus points out that their hunger was misguided. They wanted to be like the Israelites in the wilderness in the days of Moses when God would cause “bread from heaven” to show up on their doorstep every morning.

In our Old Testament reading from Exodus, we hear of how the Israelites grumbled against God. And God filled their bellies every day

through no work of their own. They could step outside their tent in the morning and take up what they needed. He sent quail for meat. And we know the rest of the story (I'm having a Paul Harvey moment). They weren't content. They grumbled all the more – later on, they go so far as to say that they “detest this miserable food.”

The crowd which followed Jesus says, “We want to be like our ancestors.” We want the bread from heaven. We want the free food. Jesus says, “I have something better than just bread which satisfies your belly for a little while. I have bread which will endure for all eternity. I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger.”

In our Gospel readings the next two weeks, you get to hear the rest of the story. Spoiler alert for next week: the crowd hears Jesus say, “I am the Bread of Life” and they grumble. They are just like their ancestors. Jesus rightfully called out their hypocrisy and challenged them: “Why are you here? And “What are you looking for?”

When confronted with the Bread of Life, we are all challenged with those questions. Our Lord freely offers Himself to us. He is the Bread which came down from heaven. You didn't come here today simply to join in singing some songs, and you certainly didn't come here today so you could watch me walk around in flowing robes.

You are here today because the Son of God, the Bread of Life has come down from heaven, offers Himself to you, and gives life to the world. Amen.