

Don't be Afraid, Trust in Jesus

John 6:1-21

Key Verse: 20

"But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.'"

Last week after the Sunday service my wife and I celebrated our 19th wedding anniversary. We went up to Lake Geneva where we had our honeymoon. It was romantic. During our short stay there, we decided to try zip lining. For those of you who don't know, zip lining is where you put on a harness and clip yourself to a line and jump off a high tower and ride the line down to the next station. Let me tell you, it's really fun but also scary. For even though you're wearing a helmet and all the gear with redundant straps it's still scary when you have to run and jump into the air off of a fifty foot tower. And as you momentarily freefall you hope that everything holds. And you're relieved and exhilarated as the line goes stiff and you zoom downhill 1200 feet at 40-50 mph and you hope you're going to be able to slow down at the end. The reason I bring this up is not to make you jealous that we got to go away but it relates to this passage. When you put all the gear on, in your head you know that it can hold you, because that's what it was designed for. But what if it doesn't hold, then it's going to be a short ride with a terrible end. So you have to overcome your fear and put your faith in it and actually jump. It's only then, when you trust the equipment, that you receive the blessing of the ride. Likewise that is what Jesus wants to teach through this passage to not be afraid, for we can trust him for he is God.

The Jewish religious leaders were supposed to take care of God's people spiritually for they had been entrusted with the Scriptures. But instead of their hearts being full of faith, hope and joy, they were full of unbelief, and as a result they became more like attack dogs instead of the shepherds they were supposed to be. And even though the Scriptures testified about Jesus, they refused to go to him. Instead of praising God when they saw him heal a paralyzed man they wanted to kill him for breaking their Sabbath law. (Jn 5) So Jesus left Jerusalem and headed to Galilee. That's where our passage opens today with a beautiful scene on a mountainside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Take a look at verses 1-4. "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." Even though the Jews tried all the harder to kill Jesus, the crowds were not deterred from seeking him. In fact it was quite the opposite; a great crowd had followed Jesus. Why? It's because they saw how Jesus had miraculously healed the sick and how he had compassion for suffering people unlike the religious leaders who only loaded them down with rules and regulations. Seeing the crowd of sick people at the pool last week we can see how desperate and despairing they were. In their desperate situation they followed Jesus believing that he was the one who could help them.

Most people, seeing such a ghastly crowd, would have freaked out with all the lepers, blind, crippled and helpless people coming toward them. Surely the needs of the crowd would have overwhelmed most people. In Matthew, Mark & Luke, we see how the disciples viewed the crowd, they wanted Jesus to send them away to fend for themselves. However Jesus was different. "When He (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?'" (v5) Jesus wasn't burdened by them

instead he was filled with compassion and saw them as sheep without a shepherd. He asked Phillip, who was from the area, where is a good place to eat. Jesus' question to Phillip revealed two things, his concern for the hungry crowd and that he was going to use this event to test & teach his disciples. (v6)

"Philip answered him, 'Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'" (v7) They say, "Listening is a skill," and apparently Philip didn't have it because Jesus didn't ask "how much," he asked "where." However Philip wasn't dumb, in reality he concluded that Jesus' request was impossible and so it didn't matter where the closest store was because they wouldn't have enough money to buy the food they needed. He may even be implying that Jesus was irrational for asking the question in the first place. Philip was the kind of person who looked at the glass as half empty. Jesus' purpose in asking the question was to get the disciples to start thinking about the situation and test them. He wasn't looking for them to solve the problem, but to realize that, humanly speaking, there wasn't a solution.

As the realization of Jesus' impossible request hits them, imagine the response of those around Jesus as Andrew speaks up. Take a look at verse 9. "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Imagine what those around Jesus would say when Andrew presents this boy's lunch of five biscuits and two tiny sardines. People would have burst out in laughter, I know I would have. Peter would have stepped back and looked away trying to pretend that he didn't know Andrew. And maybe the others would have made funny comments. Because how could this lunch feed a crowd of 5K men and if you add in their families there could maybe 5-15K people there.

However with Andrew we find something amazing. He wasn't one of the main disciples; he was in the second tier. But Andrew paid close attention to what Jesus said and did. So when Jesus asked, "where," Andrew stepped forward and said, "here." It took courage for Andrew to step up like that especially seeing the situation and what he was presenting. I don't think he was dumb I think he had faith in Jesus. Andrew was not trying to feed all the people by himself; he was simply bringing what he had and depending on Jesus to do the rest. Andrew was the opposite of Philip, he was the kind of guy who saw the glass as half full. He was a man of possibility, even in the face of adversity and I admire that about him. That's why I gave our son David - Andrew as his middle name in the hopes that he would grow to be a man of possibility.

The contrast between Philip and Andrew was a lesson to the other disciples. Andrew's faith was a good influence and made an atmosphere for Jesus to work. Hopefully those who had been thinking like Philip, or made fun of Andrew, repented. Look at verse 10a. "Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.'" The disciples were now drawn into the mind of Jesus. They were ready to co-work with him. And Jesus makes sure that the disciples participate in this miracle by getting their hands on the work. As far as we can tell, Jesus doesn't indicate what he is about to do, either to the crowd or to any of his disciples. This must have been a curious thing for the crowd and a little troubling for the disciples as they had to instruct everyone to sit down, as though a meal is about to be served, knowing they have only five biscuits and two sardines.

Take a look at verse 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." The miracle seems to take

place in the hands of our Lord, as he breaks off pieces of the barley loaves and fish. It appears he keeps reaching into the little basket where the boy had his lunch, and the food simply keeps on coming. Can you imagine the wonder and excitement as people begin to understand that Jesus is performing a miracle of this magnitude? You've probably seen people do "the wave" in a football stadium. Can't you just see the heads of people, making a wave as they spread the word that a miracle is taking place before their very eyes? And just as he turned the water into wine, Jesus doesn't announce that he is about to perform a miracle. He is not attempting to attract a bigger following. He's simply trying to take care of the needs of a hungry crowd. And so he says grace and thanks God for the meal they are about to receive and he passes out the food.

Even when all have eaten, the task isn't finished. Jesus instructs his disciples to collect all the leftovers. He didn't want anything to be wasted. To their amazement when they were finished they found they had twelve baskets full of the loaves and fish left over. (v12-13) Jesus taught his disciples to be good stewards of God's blessing. They shouldn't fall into a spoiled rich man's way of thinking expecting that God would rain bread from heaven whenever they wanted some. They had to understand that God supplies what is needed. If there is something left over, it was to supply a future need.

The gathered leftovers are a lesson in themselves. We're told that everyone in the crowd had enough to eat. It's hardly a coincidence that when the unused portions are gathered, there are 12 baskets full of leftovers. Our Lord is never stingy with His gifts. They are always enough. Each of the 12 disciples, who must have agonized over the shortage of food and the size of the crowd, walks away with a basket full of extra food. God supplies all our needs, and more. However we should notice one more thing about the meal. The meal wasn't a gourmet dinner like steak and potatoes. Barley loaves were the food of the poor. It's not that it was a bad meal, but it's not the kind of food you would expect to find at a fancy restaurant. God provides what we need and not necessarily a life of luxury.

"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.'" (v14) After seeing the miraculous sign, the people remembered Moses' prediction that a Prophet like him would come. (Dt 18:15) Moses fed the people and led them out of bondage. Likewise Jesus just fed them and so they hoped that he would lead them out of the hated Roman bondage. In one sense, they learned what they should learn: Jesus is the Prophet, the promised Messiah. But their concept of the Messiah wasn't right. They wanted to make Jesus king by force. (v15) This really makes no sense. They didn't ask Jesus, they were going to do it by force. What does that mean? Were they going to force Jesus to do it, or force out the current king and take over? They say they wanted to make Jesus their King, but what they really wanted was to turn Jesus into the "Breadmaker 1.0," their personal servant, so that he could churn out all the free biscuits and fish they could ever want. Then they could retire and enjoy an easy life without having to struggle to survive any more. They were crazy.

However, this marks the highpoint of Jesus' popularity and a great temptation for Him. Could He have the kingdom without the Cross? This is what Satan tempted him with at the beginning of his ministry. This may be a politician's dream, voters who want to make him king by force, but not Jesus, he knew that his Father's will and his purpose went down a different path, so he

quietly withdrew to a mountain by himself to pray. (Jesus' kingdom would be given to him by His Father. (Ps 2:7-12; Dan 7:13-14) It will not come from this world. (Jn 18:36) Before He could become the Lion of Judah, He must be the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29))

It must have been an exciting time for the disciples never before had they experienced a miracle like that. And they were probably worked up like the crowd hoping that Jesus would become king and they could be his right hand men. But in their excitement they didn't notice that Jesus slipped away. When evening came, they went down to the lake and got into a boat. Then they set off for Capernaum. It was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. They didn't have a care in the world for they were riding high because of the events of the day. But then a strong wind came up and the waters grew rough. It was difficult for them to do anything but fight against the wind. Then about three and a half miles from shore they hit a wall and suddenly they were terrified when they saw someone or something approaching the boat. It was Jesus. And he was walking on the water. It was another miracle. Jesus revealed his divinity and his mastery over nature. The disciples should have been relieved and welcomed Jesus. However, their fear kept them from seeing Jesus. Without faith even the great work of God can be viewed as superstitious. Without the word of God in their hearts, even Jesus' great miracle caused them great fear.

How did Jesus help them? Let's read verses 20-21. "But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.'"
²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading." Jesus' word melted their hearts so that their fear was gone and they trusted Jesus again. So what can we take away from today's passage? I believe that Jesus wants us to not be afraid and put our trust in him for he is always nearby. When Jesus walked on the water, he was demonstrating that he was God Almighty. They couldn't control him any more than they could control the wind and waves. Jesus is Lord of all and he can protect us, even in the storms of life, and he can provide all we need. Not only that I think that we can learn some practical lessons for life.

First, Jesus commands us to do more than we are (humanly) able, because He enables us to do what He commands. The disciples were inclined to push off their responsibility to feed the crowd because it seemed impossible. But Jesus didn't let them off the hook. He challenged them for what they were not able to do on their own, they could accomplish it through Jesus. They even had leftovers. God works through our weakness. He doesn't choose strong or able people so that He can use their strengths. He chooses weak people so that He can demonstrate His power through their weakness. (1 Cor 1:18-2:5; 2 Cor 4:7-5:10) He gives us tasks that are greater than our ability so that he can be glorified when it is accomplished. So we shouldn't let the size of the task be used as an excuse for not attempting it, especially when the task is our Lord's command. How easy it is to fall into this trap. For example the world mission command was given by Jesus to his disciples, and thus to his church-us. But it is a huge task, how can we carry it out, through Jesus. We should see the size of the mission as an opportunity for faith, obedience, and prayers, and not as an excuse for apathy or idleness.

Second, God accepts, blesses and uses what little we have when we give it to him. It was a sacrifice for the young boy to give his five loaves and two fish to Andrew. He might have went hungry. But when he gave it to Jesus, God performed a miracle and took what little he had to

offer and multiplied it. In reality our efforts are so small, so fallible, and yet God can use us to do His will. Even our failures are used by God to bring about His purposes. However the key is that we must be willing to sacrifice and offer our five loaves and two fish to God first. When Ison went to Malaysia, he gave up his promising future in America to serve God. Then he gave up his job in one city so that he could serve God's purpose in the capital. When he sacrificed his five loaves and two fish, God multiplied it and gave him a better job so that he could serve Jesus' world mission command. So often we want to hold on to what we have. We don't want to lose anything, but when we sacrifice, God accepts, blesses and uses it beyond our belief. (This reminds us of a miracle in the Old Testament with Elijah and the widow's oil and flour in 1 Kings 17:8-16.)

Third, our Lord cares about and takes care of our needs. Jesus takes care of these people because of their great need for teaching and healing. He also cares about their physical needs, because they are weary and hungry. Here's the secret, as we give ourselves in the service of others, God cares for our own needs in return. Those whom God uses to take care of the needs of the crowd were the ones who gained the most. I'm not saying that we give in order to get, but it's interesting to note that this young boy ends up with all he could eat, which is probably more than he had in the first place. And the disciples, who thought they had nothing to serve, each ended up with an extra basket. Do you trust God to care for your needs? Jesus was thinking about feeding the 5,000 long before it ever entered the minds of His disciples. Jesus knew all along what He intended to do. Our Lord cares, and He cares well for our needs. Most of all, He cares about our need for the forgiveness of our sins. He gave his life by dying on the cross, by bearing the guilt and punishment for our sins so that we can have eternal life. Do you truly trust in Him who cared so much that He died for you? Are you willing to take that jump of faith? Let's try to lay aside our fear and trust in Jesus.