

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."*

*15When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. 16When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.*

We were newly married, living in a 10 by 50 mobile home in a trailer court at Wartburg Seminary. For Sue in those days, each meal was pioneering new territory. The Betty Crocker Cookbook was getting a real workout. Some dishes we liked - some we did not. But there was always one question that I asked repeatedly before the meal was even ended. What are we having for our next meal? I knew I'd be hungry, I wanted to be sure something good was planned.

What my questions said to Sue was that not even for a moment would I be satisfied.

Ah, but that day on that mountain, they all were satisfied - satisfied with bread - satisfied with this one who could keep their stomachs full. They were all part of that miracle, five thousand fed with five small loaves and two little fish. Jesus did the providing, they did the consuming. They liked that arrangement. I do also.

Jesus, keep food on my table, a shelter over my head, my children safe. Give me health, security, I will worship you. You do the providing Jesus, I will do the consuming. We will get along great.

Why, that day they wanted to make him their king – this man who could make a little food an abundant feast. But Jesus would have no part of it.

John tells us that the feeding of the 5000 that day was a sign - something that points to something else – shows the way – calls forth an action – a response. But Jesus wanted no part of the response they made.

Once upon a time Satan said to God, “Job only worships you because he gets good things from you. Take away the good things and Job won’t like you anymore.”

What do you think? If you lost all the good things God has given you, would you still worship God? Is it God you love or the stuff? Maybe that was what Sue was wondering way back then, whether it was her I loved or all that good food she set before me. For if it was the food then satisfaction would be fleeting - the way all the stuff is fleeting.

A sign - twice John uses that word in today’s gospel - once of the healing of the sick - once of the feeding of the 5000.

I am always tempted to think that the reason Jesus came to this world is to get us to share and to teach us to live in healthy ways - giving food to the hungry – providing hospitals and medicines to those who have none seem things that are important in themselves. But when Jesus feeds and heals John tells us they are signs – not the important thing itself but pointing to something even more significant.

Maybe John remembered something I discover again and again: The absence of disease and a full stomach is not enough. Oh, I am satisfied for a moment – especially after I have been hungry or have suffered from illness. But soon there is a gnawing hunger that is not about food – though I often try to satisfy that hunger with food. No, that gnawing hunger is for love.

John, in writing this gospel wants every one of us to seek more for our life than food for our stomach and another week or year or decade of health. John wants us to seek the one who came that we might have life,

abundant life - Jesus. It is not that the crowd was seeking too much of Jesus but too little. They wanted him to be their king - Jesus came to be their Lord and their God.

And you, do you seek too little of Jesus? Maybe.

When the crowd had been fed, Jesus withdrew to the mountain, by himself. The disciples got into a boat to cross the sea. It was dark, Jesus had not come to them yet. The sea became rough, a strong wind was blowing. They saw Jesus walking on the water and coming near the boat and they were terrified. But Jesus said, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Do you want to take Jesus into the boat with you? Or do you want to keep on rowing on your own. John wants you to know that when you want Jesus in the boat with you that everything changes. The destination you seek, the eternal love of God, is yours in Jesus, already.