

Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

'And they themselves got into boats and went into Capernaum, seeking Jesus.'

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For they sought after Him, *on account of the loaves.*

It is easy for us to chide them, and indeed, our Lord does chide them, though gently. Better, He instructs them.

Indeed, He instructs them, for they have done what is good; they merely do not know why they have done it.

They have come, *seeking Jesus.*

Who, then, seeks after Jesus? Who among you will wander away from the cities and towns and luxuries of this life; away from your electronics and entertainment and running water; food and coffee, and *bread*; who of you will forsake these necessities of life, and turn your back to the citadels of man, and to his works, and to his ways, and cross on to the other side; cross the Tiberius of material desire, all to *seek Jesus*?

None of you do this: you dive not into the sea of God's infinite knowledge in search of the *pearl of great price*, nor sell that you may buy *a land containing great treasure*. For before us, *pearls* of heavenly wisdom, are as *cast before swine*, and land even *flowing with milk and honey* contains *no inheritance*.

Even in the holiness of this sanctum, before this altar, do you keep yourself from your cell phones? Do you keep yourself from idle conversation? Do you focus your mind upon the holy words of prayer? Upon the pious words of song? Or does your mind wander?

[If there were no other people here, no friends, no pleasant dialogue; if all about

you were strangers... would you still sit upon this pew?

If fate had gouged out your ears, and there were no organs to hear, no chants to uplift, if quietness filled the vacuum of this place, would you still raise a hand to pray before the name of the Lord?

If you were filled with envy, or anger, or spite, and every word spoken by the pastor or read from the Scriptures rang to you hollow, saccharine; if they all seemed a fool's jokes, would you *be still, and know that the Lord is God?*]

They have come, *seeking Jesus*.

We take the place of Jesus, and chide them, for '*they are not seeking Christ because of the signs, but because they ate the fill of the loaves.*'

But they have come, *seeking Jesus*.

'Woe to you, ye hypocrites; for well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, "This people draws nigh unto me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me, and in vain do they worship me."'

'Our hearts are far from Him', for we have not yet made the journey.

We have read of another journey this day. The people of Israel, too, have turned their backs upon the heights of the civilization of man, and wandered into the wilderness, that in the charring sands of Sinai, they too might know the fire and the cloud which delivers, and which saves.

Who has ever followed the glass-scorched wake of a torrent of fire? Who has ever traced their steps upon the windswept highway of a pillar of cloud? Have you ever seen yourself in that desert? Have you ever cast your gaze down upon your sandals, and seen them treading a highway of blackened desolation. Have you ever drawn your gaze up, slowly, to see over the heads of ten-hundred-thousand of your fellow people, drawn in the distance, distorted and gnarled by the flutter of blazing air, a pillar, as of fire, extending upwards into the heavens? Have you looked upon it, in hope, and in terror, and heard in your ear the promise of this infinite power, *'I am the Lord, your healer.'*

You have not, for you have not yet made the journey.

But even as the Israelites witnessed the awesomeness of their God, they became hungry; for they are but human, and all men must eat, or otherwise die.

So the Lord did not rebuke them. Rather he fed them; fed them with *manna*, that they may continue to follow the pillar of fire; the pillar of cloud. That they may seek after the Lord.

Now the Lord has come again to his people. Now again he leads them into the wilderness. Again, we read that they were hungry, for they are but human, and all men must eat, or otherwise die.

And again, our Lord feeds them.

Remember, the disciples wanted that the people return to the towns and villages, there to find their bread. But our Lord rebukes his own disciples, *'You give them something to eat.'* For the people are doing exactly as He would have them do. They are following him. They are *seeking Jesus*. And the Lord feeds them, that they might not have to forsake *the one thing needful*. But that they might rather *draw close while the Lord is near*.

And as they draw near to their Lord, and their Lord to them, out in the wilderness, Jesus instructs them: *'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the fill of the loaves. Do not work for the bread that perishes, but the bread that endures to eternal life.'*

The people are confused, even as Israel was confounded by the reckless following after the dread sight of the burning pillar. But that is okay, for their journey has barely begun.

Let us speak no more, dear Christians, of these who followed Jesus in the wilderness, who crossed from Tiberius and trafficked the sea.

Our Lord speaks to you. Indeed, He has manifested endless wonders and signs for your instruction. For He said *'Let there be light' 'and there was light'*. And he cast stars into the sky, and luminaries to govern the day and night *to be as signs to us*. The canvas of this world, which we dismiss so ungratefully he has colored with a sky of blue, and endless trees and creatures. The seas he has filled with *swarming things* both small and awesome. The morning he has painted in brightening orange, and the evening he has illustrated with a king's purple, which descends

beyond the horizon, even as the cape of a king disappears out of a palace hall.

And, He has given you all that you possess, all that you could ever possess, *for his is the world, and all that it is in it*. And if this were not enough, He has given you as a sign of His perfect kindness your life, and bread to sustain that life.

Yet all these signs you have seen, and you have not understood. All these miracles you daily witness, and yet you are confused. For the Lord would bring you into infinite glory, yet even as ancient Israel, even as those following Jesus into the desert, even as we wander into this Church, the things of this world occupy our minds, not as signs of God's divine mercy, but as ends in and of themselves.

But our Lord does not rebuke you, for you are now only beginning your journey. You are now only starting to see *the beginning of wisdom*.

So, He instructs you, *'The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'*

Now is not the time to speak of this bread of God. All things in time. It is not the moment to ponder who He is, how He is like bread, how He is given, where is He given. All things in time. And indeed, *the time is drawing near*.

For now it is enough for us to cross the sea of earthly chaos and material desire, to leave behind the idolatries of human invention and craft, and *seek Jesus, the bread of God, come down from heaven*. It is not important to know why you have done it, only that you have done it.

And when you find yourself, amid the liberated masses following the wind-swept sands and heated breath of the burning column of Sinai, when you find yourself before that mysterious Rabbi outside the ancient seas of Capernaum, then learn to pray:

'Lord, give us this bread always.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Exodus 16:2-15; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:22-35.