

John 6:1-15August 9, 2009 – 10th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Prophet Has the Answers

✦ **Jesus feeds our bodies. (vv.1-11)**

✦ **Jesus feeds our souls. (vv.12-15)**

In the name of Jesus, **The Prophet** promised by God, dear fellow disciples of our Lord:

It's very difficult for us who grew up in Christian families to understand how hard it is for other Americans in our post-Christian culture. The onslaught of evolution in our classrooms has left most college students trusting no one but their professors. And they disagree. But throughout the world other cultures clamor for authoritative prophecy to make their lives easier and help them deal with suffering.

Prophets such as Buddha said things like, "Suffering happens, so get over it." Islam teaches submission to their god Allah and his prophet Muhammad. But when I respectfully asked a Muslim security guard why the *Koran* says Muhammad's grave is in Mecca, but the supposedly lesser prophet Jesus was taken to heaven without dying, he answered, "Some things are hard to interpret."

Read the Bible; you find it clearly interprets itself. The simple message: Body and soul, we are loved by God. Out of extreme difficulty God's love shines brightly on Jesus **The Prophet**. We need to see how fully **The Prophet Has the Answers**. That will leave us with only one question.

✦ **Jesus feeds our bodies. (vv.1-11)**

Our Harmony of the Gospels Bible Class last winter discovered some very interesting things when *Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand*. Besides Jesus' resurrection, this is the only miracle of our Lord in all four Gospels. Yet comparing Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, their unique details are all in perfect harmony. We just have to pay attention to the words which the Holy Spirit inspired in each of His holy writers. Then we can appreciate **The Prophet** who **Has the Answers**.

Our text from John 6 really gives no reason why Jesus crossed to the far shore of Galilee, only that the people followed because they wanted more miracles. Wouldn't you if you had spent everything on worthless medical treatments? This Rabbi from Nazareth can heal for free? But will He? Even religious men, at least in their private conversations, often despise the poor who can't do something for them. Yet look closely at Jesus, and you find just the opposite.

Matthew reports that Jesus had just heard how His cousin and forerunner, John the Baptizer, had been beheaded. Mark relates that the people were crowding around Jesus and His disciples so much they didn't even have time to eat. Mark and Luke say it was after the Twelve returned from their first missionary journey. Jesus could see they really needed some rest. A retreat on the far side was in order.

Nurses, doctors and caregivers can appreciate how Jesus must have felt when He looked up with tired eyes. Instead of peaceful blue lake waters, Jesus saw crowds of people walking around the shoreline to reach them. It's fine when you're fresh in the morning. But pull a 48-hour shift in the ER, and nerves get frayed into flaring tempers. Yet the Holy Spirit tells us Jesus was filled with compassion, first for their bodies. He healed them. And have you noticed how Jesus healed? It was not by some mass shower of medicine to get it over with. Jesus healed one-by-one, placing His hands even on unclean lepers. Likewise personally still today, He calls each of us by name in our Baptism and puts His Name on us. Individually He says of His body and blood: "Given and shed for you...for you...for you."

Think how His disciples must have felt for Jesus to ask Philip as soon as He saw the crowds: "**Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?**" "**Eight months wages**" at today's minimum wage of \$58 per day comes to \$11,600 just for bread. Was this just an impractical Rabbi question? Remember, Jesus is **The Prophet** who **Has the Answers**. So John reports that Jesus "**asked this only to test [Philip]**,

for he already had in mind what he was going to do.” Apparently, Jesus’ question bothered the other disciples all day long as He was teaching and healing the crowds. Because the other Gospel writers report that late in the day the disciples came to Jesus with their solution: *“Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”* Isn’t that typical? We run into problems we can’t solve, so we just punt or foul out. But our compassionate Savior who **feeds our bodies** answered: *“You give them something to eat.”* (Mark 6:36f NIV) When they objected Jesus ordered, *“Have the people sit down.”*

Jesus created bread and fish, so why use a little boy’s lunch? Is Jesus teaching us not to despise the little things and to make use of what God provides? Barley makes cheap bread. Is Jesus a poor cook?

For the sake of this sermon, I’ll admit making only one cake in my life, my bride’s birthday our first year married. I rushed home from Sem and found a box mix from a wedding shower. Jiffy white cake calls for an 8” pan. It was fine until I pulled the 8 x ½ inch cake out of the oven. No problem. Cut and stack the cake. It would have helped for the icing to be less sticky. But flat to the wall, the dry side didn’t need icing anyway. It’s the thought that counts. And my bride was nice enough to eat a bite.

The Prophet here is also the Creator. He blesses with thanks to our Father in heaven and breaks in a simple, natural way. **Jesus feeds our bodies** – no question, except only one. But first...

✦ **Jesus feeds our souls. (vv.12-15)**

Matthew reports that *“the number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.”* (14:21 NIV) It would have been an awesome miracle if Jesus had just sent everyone home at that point. But **The Prophet Has the Answers** to more than just our physical needs. **Jesus feeds our souls** in ways that we cannot see, much less request from God’s bountiful goodness.

No doubt Jesus wants to teach us not to waste. But look closely at the Greek original and the Holy Spirit did not have John use the normal word for leftovers. *“Gather the fragments that remain,”* really means over the top, way past needs. You know how some Christians like to say, “God does not always give us what we want, but He gives us what we need.” True enough, but that does not do justice to God’s gracious goodness. This was not fish and chips. Their hunger was fully satisfied. Our God promises, *“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* (Psalm 37:4 NIV) Pray those desires are good because in His loving kindness our gracious God dearly desires to bless His own. *“Twelve baskets”* full of pieces! Don’t think for a second that barley bread just didn’t taste good. Only one time in the New Testament, right here in John 6:13, the Holy Spirit uses a word (βιβρωσκω) as we would say, “voracious appetite,” or “They devoured their food.” They loved it. And they were satisfied.

And that’s why Jesus left. **The Prophet Has the Answers. Jesus feeds our souls.** But that means He cannot abide stubborn crowds wanting to force Him to be a Bread-King. Jesus cannot allow His disciples to hang around with sinful hearts for the good life. For Jesus to settle for such empty glory would be like painting a ruby or varnishing a diamond. *“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world!”* – so true. Jesus truly fulfills all God’s promises through all the Old Testament prophets. To the Israelites in 1500 B.C., Moses said, *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”* (Deuteronomy 18:15) Does that help you with the one outstanding question? Jesus came to shed His blood and wash away our sins of eating too much, coveting more, and taking the credit for our own success. **The Prophet** loves to feed **our bodies**. He had died and rose again to feed **our souls** for life everlasting with God in heaven.

Only one question remains: Do you trust Him to feed your body and soul? Church time is easy. But God give us His grace for the next stack of bills. In real life we need to answer, “Yes, Lord. I trust you. Let me give to you first. Let me take time for church first, for I believe that *‘man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*” (Matthew 4:4 NIV) I believe you when you promise: *“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* (Psalm 37:4 NIV) For my body and soul, Lord, I believe Jesus, **The Prophet Has the Answers.** Amen.