

Our gospel ends in such a strange way this morning. “And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”<sup>i</sup> If you didn’t get to hear the gospel last week you might be going “What loaves?” Last week, we heard the gospel where Jesus fed about 10,000 people including woman and children with five loaves and two fish. Everyone ate and was filled. Today’s gospel comes right after, and Jesus sends the disciples off in a boat, and tells them he will dismiss the crowd. The weather gets a little rough and the disciples are straining at the oars. Jesus comes to them over the water. They are terrified. Jesus gets into their boat and calms the wind, but they do not understand about the loaves.

What does it mean to understand about the loaves? It is a most frustrating thing not to understand.

Most of us have experienced it at least once if not many times in our lives. We have times when we just can’t make sense of what we have seen and heard. And this is where the disciples seem to be in this morning’s gospel – they did not understand about the loaves and their hearts were hardened.

Why did they not understand about the loves? Well one might say – how can you understand about the loaves? Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed about 10,000 people. How does one understand that anyway? It is a miracle. Miracles are not meant to be understood.

What does it mean to understand about the loaves? The disciples are astounded by all these things Jesus had done and it blinds them to the meaning of Jesus’ actions. Jesus fed thousands with five loaves of bread. Jesus walks on water, and comes to the disciples calming the storm. but the disciples do not understand about the loaves. What does it mean to understand about the loaves?

If we turn to the Old Testament lesson, Elisha is about to lose his master, Elijah, who is a great prophet of the Lord. It seems as if everyone know what is going to happen and perhaps they are

worried that they are going to lose Elijah. Every time Elisha follows Elijah to another town, there are a bunch of prophets just waiting to ask Elisha if he knows that today the Lord will take his master away from him? Elisha responds to them - yes, he knows that Elijah is going to be taken away and asks them to be silent. Elisha insists on following his mentor, Elijah, even though Elijah tells him to stay three times. They travel along and then Elijah is taken up into heaven. Elisha is alone and he acts as the prophet that he is. He takes up Elijah's mantle and stands in front of the Jordan where he need to cross and says "Where is the Lord the God of Elijah?" The water parts just as it did for Elijah when they crossed before. The other prophets realize that the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. God is still with them.

God is with us. God is still with us. This is the theme of the day – God is with Elisha when Elijah has gone. Jesus comes to the disciples when they are in trouble. Jesus feeds the crowds when they are in need of food. This is the meaning of the loaves – God is with us. God will stay with us and nourish us. The loaves that Jesus provided to the crowd when they were hungry are a symbol that Jesus will provide for us and that Jesus will always be with us. This is what it means to understand about the loaves. A sermon that I read put it beautifully. This is what the preacher said "*To understand about the loaves means that we begin to realize, first and always, that Jesus is with us, no matter how bad the storm, no matter how far from land our little boat may be, no matter how impossible the trip from where Jesus is to where we are may seem, he is with us.*"<sup>ii</sup>

God is with us always. Even though the great prophet Elijah is taken away, God sends a new prophet Elisha, who can also part the waters of the Jordan just as his master did a short time before. Those watching realize that God is still with them and has sent them another great prophet. Jesus comes to his disciples even though they do not understand and are terrified. Jesus comes and calms the wind. Jesus is with them.

Do we understand about the loaves? Do we understand that God is always with us? I was talking to someone this past week that had recently been a bad accident. Both she and her husband were injured and are now slowly getting better. She said “Boy when you go through something like that, you really believe. We both should have been dead and yet here we are – injured but basically OK.

She says every time she thinks of it, there are so many things that seemed to come together to save them. While the accident was happening and their car was being pushed into the oncoming lanes of traffic, it was as if they were being protected. At that moment, there were no other cars coming even though it was at the height of the beach traffic and even though there had previously been a stream of cars coming from that direction. There was a stone wall that stopped them going over the cliff.

Somehow the window which had been closed was open and there were able to get out of the car that was on fire. Her radiologist looked at her scans and said “Honey somebody loves you because you shouldn’t be here.” She was left with a strong sense that she and her husband were being protected. God was with them.

I think many of us have had times like that - moments where we are terrified and in danger and yet it is so clear that God is with us. We are protected. We are left in awe – wondering at the love that surrounds us and the presence that is with us. And yet at other times when we are in the most scary and worst times of our lives, we forget that God is with us in the midst of them. How do we remember that God is with us always? How do we remember to connect to that miraculous presence that is always with us? How do we remember about the loaves? One way is through prayer – stopping to be in the presence of God. Another way is by coming to church. When we praise God in community, when we hear the word of God and receive the body and blood of Christ, we are reminded of that presence. When we see the face of Christ in another person, we remember.

As I was thinking of ways in which we remember that God is with us, I recalled one of my prayer practices I used, when I had to go into an interview or into a difficult situation and wanted to remember that God was always with me. I would sit quietly and imagine the place I was going to be in. I would imagine Jesus in that place before I got there – walking around, touching the chairs and the places I was going to be in. Then I imagined Jesus coming with me, walking next to me, standing behind me as I gave my presentation or as I answered the interviewer's questions. Jesus was with me and remembering that helped quell my fears and gave me the strength to go forward. It helped me remember that God was present wherever I was and wherever I was going.

God is with us. God is in the storms, in the accidents, in our walking down the street. God is with us when we are scared. God is coming to us across the water, across whatever we might think is in the way saying, "I am here. I love you. I will never leave you." As you go forth from this church, remember that you are not sent out alone. Remember the meaning of the loaves. You do not walk alone. You do not drive alone. You are not in this world alone. God is with you always.

---

<sup>i</sup> Mark 6:51a-53, NSRV

<sup>ii</sup> Sermons that Work, [http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons\\_that\\_work\\_6319\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_6319_ENG_HTML.htm), Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 12 July 27, 2003 by The Rev. James Liggett, rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Big Spring, Texas.