

Last Sunday, after what I perceived as a very challenging sermon, I came home and read the four scriptures for today. I was really drawn to the Ephesians text and continue the journey on being one. In the text, we can resonate with the church at Ephesus because they were discouraged and losing heart.

However, when I read the Gospel text, I knew that is where I had to go, no questions asked. I can tell you that if you stepped into many ELCA congregations today, many would lean into the Book of Ephesians over the Gospel because the lectionary leans heavily into multiple weeks of “bread” and that scares and tires out many pastors. So, why did I choose the Gospel text?

There were two words that originally jumped out to me and those words were hunger and fear. I then decided that I was going to do an experiment. Can I be honest with you for a moment? The experiment only lasted for about 36 hours and I gave up. I know, I know, I have peeked your interest. I know you are just dying to know what is the experiment that PJ gave up on. Well, I thought, that I would read the top 20 headlines each day and pick out the headlines and articles that dealt with fear. Whoa, what a task, there was fear everywhere. Fear that the market was going to crash on Monday, the fear that the west coast was going to completely burn up that the Covid surge in the south was going to create mandates for school kids to mask up, and fear on both sides of the Roe vs Wade debate as the Supreme Court and then fear of water stealing bandits in California. Did you know that over the last 8 years, the water stealing bandits have stolen over 12 billion gallons of water. I quickly shut the computer and said that experiment is done because here in Wisconsin, we all now know that the only one that really matters is the realization that you should truly “Fear the Deer”.

When I take a step back, I see that there are two miracles in the Gospel reading. We see Jesus feeding the 5,000, This miracle is where the theme of hunger arises. Then, we see Jesus walking on water at night in a storm and that is where the fear theme arises because the disciples who are in the boat have extreme fear.

I am hoping this morning, we can quickly move through the two miracles and by me sharing with you what stood out to me and what I learned that maybe you can grab ahold of something that will be meaningful to you and then hopefully, I can give you a sound principle that will help us as a community of believers. So, first, the miracle of feeding the 5,000.

I love the conversation that Jesus has with Philip and Andrew. Philip is telling Jesus that it will take six months of wages to just get everyone a piece of bread. Andrew, most likely be sarcastic shared that there is a boy with five barley loaves and two fishes. It is time for the miracle. Jesus feeds them ALL. Now, I want to focus on something this week that I have never really realized. In the Gospel of John, John does not simply use the term bread, like the other Gospel writers. Instead, he clearly states that it is **barley**. For you see, barley bread was the bread that was available to the poor.

If you have been listening into the daily readings, you would see that today’s story parallels what we have heard in the Elisha story of feeding. The readers and hearers of the first century would have had their memories taken back to the early prophets. I will come back to one major point of this story, but first, I need to take you into the second miracle; so, it all ties together nicely, yet messy because it has real implications for us today.

In the second miracle, it is set up because Jesus steps away. He needs time by himself. The crowds disperse and the disciples get in the boat. It is dark. They are about 3 miles away from shore. A huge storm rolls in. They are terrified. This is where the fear of the second story comes into play. Jesus is walking on the water towards them. He talks to them, "IT IS I". The words that he spoke and the voice recognition calms their fear and maybe automatically being transported to the place they were headed, helped as well.

In our two stories, Jesus responded to the needs of the crowd and the disciples. Jesus is active through both miracle and simple presence.

Now, hopefully, I can tie this together. I think hunger and fear are still realities today. There are tens of millions of Americans who deal with food insecurity and there are tens of millions of Americans who allow fear to grip their lives.

Scarcity vs Abundance

Which do we live into as individuals, our church and our nation?

It is my hope and prayer that we can look around our surrounding communities and see where there is hunger and food insecurities and be a beacon of life. We can take a two-prong approach. We can help out by feeding others through food pantries, hunger initiatives and meals for our community. One aspect that I will help try to initiate is also food drives for the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay campus as they battle food shortages for their college students.

Then let's be honest, fear is basic to us being human. Fear drives us in many aspects. Whether it be the fear of failure or a fear of uncertain future and those gnaw at me with this new call. But, we can hear Jesus call and we can hear the call throughout the bible; fear not. So, let's take a brief moment, think of your biggest fear. Grab a hold of it in a tight fist. Now, let it go. Release it over to God.

As I close this sermon out. One of the fears that I hear and have sensed at Bay View is finances. Will we run out of money? Can we take one last look at the feeding of the 5,000 and lean into a truth that is often over looked and or missed.

Yes, Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish. But, and this is a huge but, the community who was poor and had many needs showed generosity. They had bread in their hands AND instead of hoarding it; they passed it on to their neighbor. If there were individuals in the community, on the grass that did not participate in the passing of the food; all would have not been fed. They trusted in God's abundance and because of that, all were fed and had more than enough and there were left overs.

Too many times in our lives and communities, we see individuals who believe there is "not enough" so they keep it for themselves. You can decide what the "it" is. In 2020, the it may have been toilet paper. That was just crazy.

Anyways, it is past my time, once again; so let me give you this challenge. Pass the Basket. May our community be about community and not selfishness or individualism and may we truly care for each one in here and each one on the streets that have not been introduced to our community and generosity. **AMEN**