

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Most often, the lectionary organization of Bible scripture does not follow a story in line from week to week....unlike your favorite television drama. You get into a good, juicy story, you want to pick it up where you left off...and our Bible readings do not generally do that for us...which is meh. But, you know what? Today, we have the very next episode..so, let us look at it very carefully and treasure what we are given. But first, it helps to quickly review last week.

Five thousand were fed, starting with a boy's five loaves of bread and two fish. But that is not the lesson, so that is not the story that Jesus tells. It is actually a lesson in leadership. Faced with the obviously overwhelming challenge of five thousand hungry mouths to feed, the apostles stall out . They question. They doubt. But Jesus leads differently right away. He teaches them by the example of action. He moves. The need is there, so he does something. What was the lesson from Jesus? Is he simply a Type A personality, able to affect all around him and all of history thereafter, just by his will? By the force of his personality?

What makes him different? His relationship with God is so tight, so unique, that he has absolute faith in God's answer to prayer...so he is not afraid. He does not know fear in the ways that we do....does not recognize, let alone settle for answers and actions limited to man alone. Quite simply, Jesus is able, as a man, to let God be his God to such a degree that we will not comprehend, and he understands his entire being, his role, and his ministry, by doing just that. He introduces them, and us, to the miracle of God at work, and reveals how and why God is at work...all the time, if we but had the brains and eyes to see it. So, what is next?

The message continues on the very next day following the big meal. And, right away, it seems that not all of the five thousand stick around. That is interesting because, in the face of witnessing an obvious miracle, many still left. Maybe in their minds, the magic show was over. Jesus and his disciples left in a boat for the night, so it was curtain down.

Sometimes I talk about how God gets my attention sometimes with a 2x4 across the forehead. But, it seems that even when it is obvious that God is doing the swinging, and stuff happens as a result of God at work, the reaction of human nature is not predictable. Some folks will not see or hear...or, having seen or heard, they do not care. Because they care more about the bread. Care more about the show. The material things of this world that satisfies in the here and now.

Theologian Lawrence Richards remarks that so much in our relationship with Jesus remains rooted in materialism. We trust him...hoping that he will keep us healthy, or get us a job, or even give the numbers so we can win the Lotto. There is nothing different here, so we can probably assume that some who stayed around this next day may have only stayed because they are looking for breakfast.

Maybe Jesus IS a type A personality after all. After they found him on the other side of the sea, they ask him the question of when he got here, his reply is non-responsive as he directly calls them out, saying, “You are looking for me only because of the food that you ate, not the signs that you saw.” And he continues: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.”

Does this make sense? Well, on the face of it, even with modern day food stamps and church food pantries, the most realistic way that you or I get any of the things we need in life...particularly food...is that we have to work for it. And, on the other hand, the “heavenly food” that Jesus talks about cannot be earned by labor, even though he says to labor for it.

But Jesus is not done. There is more. “Work for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man, or I will give you. It is on me that God the Father has set his seal.”

They catch on right away, and ask the obvious question. “If this is a gift, then where is the work? What do we have to do to perform the works of God?”

His answer is clear.

Well, in bringing us back to this morning, here at church, it is after breakfast time this morning, and we are all here...so it seems safe to say that we are gathered here, more in tune with the questions and answers presented in the later part of this gospel reading. The splitting of ways in this parish comes by asking...or not asking the question, “What do we have to do to perform the works of God?”

That is the connector to last week’s gospel reading and message. Last week’s crowd, the five thousand, were there for deliverance, some in the form of fish and bread, and others to hear the continuing Word of God. But, this week, Jesus engages a group of people who are making that bridge by asking the question. It seems that they want to know the God who provides. Spiritually hungry for more than knowing the God who only delivers.

People who are ready in life to ask the bold questions, asking essentially the following of Jesus, “We know about the basics of our faith. We know that “it is written” that our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness. So what are you doing any differently, Jesus? What work are you performing? How can we do this?”

Bold indeed. They are asking the **real** questions of God. Moving to engage God. Daring to even challenge God. Yesterday, they saw God’s miracle worked through the hands of Jesus. And today? They want to know how...and Jesus tells them they only need to believe in him.

Last Sunday, we talked about tremendous challenges facing us...thinking about, and considering different and new ways to engage the community among us. Reaching out to them, and others, as a parish.

We have good hearted and dedicated people here who are active in the greater community, giving their love and talents in many different ways...at work, at leisure, in worship.

So, maybe it is not a matter of the amount of effort that is the real subject. Perhaps it is

something else?

Faced with the challenge of feeding the five thousand, we saw the disciples frozen in fear, indecision, and doubt. But, with the benefit of the lesson from Jesus, we see our challenges...the ones we already have, or ones we might still engage...that our challenges are really wonderful blessings in the hands of God...

Real opportunities to “perform”, in using the focus word of the disciples we read about today. To do the work of God...which is what?

What is the work of God we are called to do?

Gabby Douglas was a 16-year old, American girl who won the 2012 Olympic individual gold medal for women’s gymnastics. I heard a sound bite of her interview on the 6:00 a.m. radio newscast just a day or so after, and she almost literally said, “I give the glory to God.”

“OK”, I thought, “nice composure for a 16-year old kid to give a sound bite like that”.

And then, she said further: “It is a win-win. The glory goes up to God, and the blessings rain down on me.”

Now, I thought, “Wow. What 16-year old kid talks like that? She is really on to something!” If that is her take, I would love to go to her church and see what it is all about.

Well, what it is all about is what she did in that moment...talking about God, through the telling of our stories....the sharing, by word and deed, of the blessings, and lives, and miracles that we witness all the time.

Or, at least we could do that...if we had a relationship with God like that. Maybe we know God the way that the Hebrews in today’s old testament reading knew him...blaming Moses in word, but really blaming God that they were delivered from Egypt only to die out here in the wilderness. In other words, “God, what have you done for me lately?” The God who only delivers when times are tough. “If you get me through this, God, I promise that I will....whatever.”

Or maybe we know God the way that Gabby Douglas knows God. The God who provides.

This Sunday, we see the answer to our prayer last week, when we asked God to “give us the vision, and the courage, and the faith to move ahead...keeping our actions in step with Jesus, whose firm faithfulness in your goodness and mercy continues to lead us.”

What do we have to do to perform the works of God?

For starters, we could believe in the way of Jesus, and hold on tight for what follows...in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.