



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
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**The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
9 August, 2026**

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

Last week we jumped ahead in the Gospel of Matthew and listened to the story of the Transfiguration, a short detour, causing us to miss the story of the feeding of the five thousand, which happens immediately prior to the story of Jesus walking on water.

Preceding the feeding of the five thousand we have a different banquet, that of Herod, during which John the Baptist is beheaded. If you find yourself with some time this week I recommend sitting down with your Bible and simply reading these short passages to yourself.

See them for the stark opposites that they are: the light filled, plain-as-day gift offered to us on the wide expanse of Christ's living table, and the dark, death dealing poisonous affair offered by Herod. I do not believe it is by accident that both the authors of Matthew and Mark introduce the feeding narratives by way of Herod's banquet. I think we are meant to see just how different it is to live according to the way of Jesus

Right in the middle of the feeding narratives we find Jesus, walking on water.

Matthew writes, "After he dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake."

I imagine it this way: It is as if Jesus, seeing them from over the horizon, steps down of the mountain and with 2-3 giant steps strides across the water, as tall as a mountain himself until he comes into view, at the last-minute reverting to his human height, and it is then that they see him coming through the storm.

An essential reminder of the Incarnation: The Son of God stepping down from on high, coming alongside humankind and inviting us to take heart and not be afraid. It is I, he says. It is I, the great I am.

What do we see when we center this in the feeding narratives? What is happening here in the bigger picture? One thing to see is the geographical location of these three events on the landscape. One on one side of the Sea and one on the other. One open air miracle banquet for the already "in crowd", a



Jewish community on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, and one for the Gentile crowd, somewhere on the southeastern side of the sea.

In both cases, the crowds are enormous, and the healings are many. In both cases, the food of this world is sparse, but the food of everlasting life is abundant. In both cases we get Bible math. Five loaves and two fishes in the first story and seven loaves and a few small fish in the second.

In both cases, Jesus takes, blesses and breaks what the people offer and produces enough for all. There is no altar, no temple, just the earth on which they sit, God's first Temple: The created order. Jesus is demonstrating for us that he has come to feed and sustain all people and that we are to do likewise.

I invite you to put yourself in the place of those who were fed; to experience the very sanctification of the ground on which the people sat, to experience with them the realization that all the land is holy, even the foreign soil of desert lands. And that this holy land can produce what we need, that scarcity is a lie told to scare us off from living in accordance with God's dream for creation.

The story of abundance is the story in which the drama on the Sea sits within. The three stories are a triptych displaying that this is God's world and we all belong to God. We now shift our attention to the centerpiece of today's lesson. When told to, the disciples dutifully leave Jesus behind and sail across the sea without him. Did they stop to wonder why?

Like, why on earth are they going ahead across the sea as if it is going to be the easiest of things for Jesus to find them again? Did they not worry, even, that, following the arrest and execution of John the Baptist, leaving Jesus alone was not the wisest idea? Consider the possibility that Jesus gave them a test. Imagine, they are all tired, especially Jesus. They have been traveling and dealing with crowds for days.

While the five thousand are wrapping up their meal, Jesus sends the disciples immediately away so he can finally be alone and pray. What if the better answer would have been to say, "Jesus, take your time, go be alone, we will wait for you here." But just as they cannot watch and wait with Jesus at Gethsemane, they cannot wait and watch with him here on shore. And so, he lets them go.

They get out on the water by themselves, ahead of Jesus. Our human story is filled with images of what happens when we get out over our skis, ahead of what God envisions for us: Golden calves, meaningless towers, lost sheep. Our actions betray our belief that we are called to go it alone.

Today during our Eucharistic prayer we will hear the words, "We failed to honor your image in one another and ourselves; we would not see your goodness in the world around us."

Notice the careful choice of language. The prayer does not say we could not see God's goodness in the world, it says in our willfulness we would not see it. We choose to see other than how God sees. God sees a world for us in which we are not going it alone, but together, interdependent on one



another, listening for God's still small voice, allowing Jesus to lead. We spend a lot of time in boats with the wrong people at the helm.

The storm is not the problem, it is never the problem, in fact, it is a gift. It is our response to the storms of our lives that gets us in trouble. The disciples are placed in a position that recalls them back to reality.

It is not that we are to never embark on journeys or take risks. It is just that we are supposed to remember to wait for Jesus and recognize that he is meant to be in the boat. When we allow him to set our course, new horizons open up. What God imagines for us is always better than what we imagine when we doing the work of imagining alone.