

PENTECOST 10

Proper 12 - Year B

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

2 Kings 4:42-44

⁴² A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." ⁴³ But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord: They shall eat and have some left." ⁴⁴ He set it before them; they ate and had some left, according to the word of the Lord.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Standing on its own, this is a bit of a confounding passage of scripture. Who are these people? Where are these places? What message are we to glean? Some background: This selection comes from a series of miraculous doings worked by the prophet Elisha. Empowered by God, he takes a comparatively small amount of bread – the first fruits that normally would be given to God via a temple – and gives it to a huge crowd. Elisha's servant is dumbfounded – what use is this small gift?

And yet – it is of use. God somehow multiplied the bread, satiating the crowd – and there were leftovers! The lesson is clear: every gift is meaningful to God and can be used to glorify him and raise up the community. And perhaps moreover – God's generosity is boundless.

Discussion Questions

What were your first thoughts upon reading this passage?

Where have you sensed God's provision in your life?

Psalm 145:10-19

- ¹⁰ All your works praise you, O Lord, *
and your faithful servants bless you.
- ¹¹ They make known the glory of your kingdom *
and speak of your power;
- ¹² That the peoples may know of your power *
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
- ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; *
your dominion endures throughout all ages.
- ¹⁴ The Lord is faithful in all his words *
and merciful in all his deeds.
- ¹⁵ The Lord upholds all those who fall; *
he lifts up those who are bowed down.
- ¹⁶ The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, *
and you give them their food in due season.
- ¹⁷ You open wide your hand *
and satisfy the needs of every living creature.
- ¹⁸ The Lord is righteous in all his ways *
and loving in all his works.
- ¹⁹ The Lord is near to those who call upon him, *
to all who call upon him faithfully.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

This psalm continues a theme of the Old Testament reading: God's generosity. It goes a bit further, too, in that it recommends a response to such generosity, namely, gratitude. This gratitude is not content to be expressed through a hearty, "Thanks, God!" It demands consistent praise, blessing, and (listen up, Episcopalians) sharing our faith.

There is a hymn that people seem to either love or hate – "Earth and All Stars" – which lists things from planets to snowstorms to cellos to wisdom, enjoining all of them to praise God with their very substance. With our lips, with our lives, we must do the same.

Discussion Questions

What is your immediate reaction to God's love?
When you feel it most intensely, what do you do?

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

God's power to fill us up is, as you've no doubt noticed, a theme of today's scripture. In Ephesians, the focus is not so much on satiating physical hunger but rather on being reoriented and rooted the correct way. Paul prays fervently for the church to understand what is being offered by God – salvation, love, joy, the fullness of God. The world cries out as we seek fullness elsewhere: in buying useless things that gobble up resources and then waste away in landfills, in using other human beings to satisfy whatever fleeting desires we have, in making sure we have our fill before passing a gift on to others. This is not the way things have to be – “God is able to accomplish abundantly more than all we can ask or imagine.”

Discussion Questions

How can we begin disengaging from overconsumption and engaging something more faithful?

John 6:1-21

6 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

And so, we circle back to feeding a great number of people with limited resources. Jesus harkens back to the Old Testament, when God rained down manna on the people, or when Elisha fed the crowd from 2 Kings. In this way, Jesus makes a statement about who he is and how the people will relate to him: He fulfills our needs *abundantly*.

This can be a hard season in the church. There are always needs, and for many congregations, they can be stretched to the breaking point. Finances cause struggles, people come and go, longtime faithful members go on to glory. And yet – what a testament the church’s faith in Jesus is. We *do* find, we *will* find, that our fears can be overcome and our needs can be miraculously met, simply by calling out in faith our Lord, who bids us over and over, “Do not be afraid.”

Discussion Questions

Where in your life can you remove a bit of fear and add a little prayer?

Do you most often think in terms of abundance or scarcity? Why?