

Christ Episcopal Church

2 Emerson Street

East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 12 (B)

July 29, 2018

DRAFT

“Our Life Guard Walks on Water”

8 AM and 10 AM Sermons

by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

John 6:1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When 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?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip

answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus 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. Then 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” So, they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When 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.”

When 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. When evening

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

O Lord, give us hearts for helping those who starving and drowning.

Amen.

The old Maldavian seafront town had a wonderful reputation for pulling out of the water those whose boats had foundered on their rocky shore as they were heading to port. Every week it seemed like someone needed saving; sometimes more than one boatload were pulled back to safety. The townspeople encouraged each other as every able-bodied person in that town took turns in

pairs or more keeping watch for a full day and night. Every day there were at least two people on duty, and all the town took shifts. They trained each other in CPR and cardio-resuscitation; some were even sea divers who were skilled at pulling out those from boats that had gone under water. After they got the unfortunate sailors ashore, they would wrap them in warm blankets and give them a beverage and some food, and a tent or a room at the local motel so they would have a place to stay until they could get on the next boat leaving the

port. And to cheer them up a bit after their ordeal, they would sing them some of the hymns they had learned from their grandparents and other relatives and friends, and they would also comfort them with a few verses from their favorite Bible stories. And almost everyone was saved. The town celebrated greatly each time they pulled a person to safety. But the weather was sometimes very difficult, and over time the town decided to build a sea-saving shelter from which to launch the lifesaving efforts; it soon became a

comfortable beach front establishment. Some of the swimmers began to bring in sandwiches and salads and their favorite beverages, and they would occasionally have grand parties on some weekends. However, as it turned out over time, more people were interested in the entertainment than in swimming and lifesaving and telling Bible stories—after all, it was a rocky shore, and occasionally the lifesavers got some cuts and bruises when they went out to pluck unfortunate sailors from the surf. So, they began to group themselves in

several specialized categories:
swimmers, divers, beverage and
sandwich makers, singers, entertainers,
and so on. Over time it became more
and more difficult to attract enough
swimmers and divers into the lifesaving
establishment. And over the years, the
town grew less and less interested in
doing lifeguarding—there just were not
enough to have volunteer swimmers on
duty every night--but more and more
were interested in having their fun get-
togethers each week. A few noticed that
the ships kept foundering on the rocky

shore and that more and more were unable to survive the sea wrecks. They tried to bring the problem to the attention of those at the lifesaving station, but the parties were often having too much fun to hear their announcements, and when they could hear them, they nodded their heads but quickly went back to their food and entertainment. The lifesaving station became a grand place for weddings and baptisms and even funerals, although a some noticed that most of the funerals were for those who had washed up on their shore. But the general mood of the

town was upbeat. It's a great place to live, they said.

The church down the street from where I live puts up clever messages on their outdoor sign board each week. This week's message said, "Our lifeguard walks on water." And indeed, they are using the same gospel as are we this Sunday, where Jesus not only feeds the five thousand, but soon after that grand miracle, his disciples see Jesus walking across the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a storm.

In John's gospel, unlike Matthew's version of this story, Jesus does not pull Peter up from drowning as Peter attempts to walk on the stormy sea towards his Master. John's gospel focuses more on just the two great miracles, the feeding of five thousand people using the lunch of a boy who happened to be in the crowd, and, of course, the walking on water miracle. Jesus could defy gravity and storms.

The gospel writer today however does focus on the details which the other gospels did not include, such as more

details on how Jesus was able to feed so many. John's gospel reveals that Jesus was able to multiply the small lunch of a boy who was present; he only had five crude barley loaves and two fish. But Jesus ignores the fact finding of Andrew who asks how on earth can we feed so many from such little.

Jan and I went a few years ago to St. John in the Virgin Islands. When we were able to get through all the airport and traffic and lines, we arrived just after the official check in time that that particular discount airline posted. So,

the gate agents said, ‘Sorry, we would have to take the next plane’. We waited several hours for the next plane but noted that upstairs people were apparently still arriving at the departure gate of our original flight. In any event, we found out that when our flight landed in Puerto Rico, that our bags would not be deplaned, and we had to sleep in our clothes in an airport motel. After we arrived early the next morning at St. Thomas, someone said that we should have ignored the gate agents and gone on up to the gate where we would have been

able to leave on time. But in our somewhat grubby condition on St. Thomas', it was a Sunday, we decided to make the most of it and found our way to the cathedral which was there on St. Thomas. Since we had arrived on the first plane into St. Thomas, we were quite early getting to the cathedral. However, we were surprised that the cathedral was already half full of many local Virgin Islanders with their families sitting quietly in the pews. Later some of them told us, since the last hurricane the cathedral had installed air

conditioning at the same time they replaced the old roof with a high-tech roof that could ‘rise up’ when there was an extreme low pressure above it caused by the hurricane. As a result, the cathedral has escaped mostly unharmed through every subsequent hurricane.

And the people told us how wonderful it was to have an airconditioned cathedral, especially in their normal high humidity seasons. Sometimes, when we get lemons, we need to consider making lemonade.

Jesus did not look on the boy's small lunch as any sort of impediment. Jesus simply saw that as an opportunity to show what he could do with so little. He was unworried about the outcome and instead he focused more on getting the people seated on the grass than on what he was preparing to do. Then they all had a good view of Jesus offering the few loaves and giving thanks to his heavenly father for them, and so also the fish. And everyone ate until they were satisfied. It wasn't just a snack, it was a full course meal. And after the meal,

they just couldn't eat any more. And Jesus said 'let's keep the leftovers for another day'; there were enough scraps to fill a basket for every one of his disciples; he apparently could snack off what they had himself.

Free food gets one known as "the prophet who was to come into the world." Maybe we too can recognize him.

Amen.

Description:

Jesus is undeterred by our lack of resources or faith, and with what little we can offer, Jesus can work mighty miracles. He is not bothered by storms or winds. His disciples, possibly with over self-confidence after feeding the great crowd, decide to make it on their own in their boat in the sea, but they realize in a storm that for their well-being Jesus needed to be in the boat with them.

Tags:

Sea, sailors, rescue, Peter, Andrew, John,
Matthew, miracle, loaves, fish, boy,
walking, water, storm, leftovers, basket,
disciples, crowd, St. Thomas, hurricane,
St. John, Virgin Island, lemonade, sign,
lifeguard, walks, bible, entertain, sing,
party, station, lifesaving, diver,
swimmer, tent, motel, specialized, music

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 S. Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 12 (B)

July 26, 2015

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

“Guardian Angels”

The Holy Gospel: John 6:1-21

Dear Lord, give us this day the bread that helps us live forever with you.

Amen.

Today we hear two of the most fantastic stories in the New Testament—the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus’ walking on water. Both of these miracles suspend our normal ways of thinking—isn’t that what makes them miracles?—and we gain new insights into this life of faith we live as Christians. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle reported in

all the four Gospels, and it became a symbol of Christianity very early after apostolic times—the ancient fourth century church near the existing church at the Mount of Beatitudes beside the Sea of Galilee has two fish and five loaves as a mosaic in the middle of the floor of the remnant of that church which can still be seen today. And as Father Andy noted in his sermon last week, the symbol of a fish remains one of the most known symbols of Christianity today, and the letters of Greek word for “fish”, “ichthus”, means Jesu Christus Theos

Huios Soter, or Jesus Christ Son of God,
Savior.

Now some will always try to explain these two miracle stories as simply fanciful imaginations or mis-reported events. However, our usual ways of sorting events into either being imaginary or mis-reported seem to be taken off track in this instance by the fact they are reported by two independent eye witnesses. In the Gospel according to John one of these miracles—the bread and fish, is a more elaborate story than in the other three Gospels, but the other—

walking on water—is a much less detailed story in John’s gospel. John’s gospel includes the explanation of where the small offering of bread and fish came from—a young boy’s lunchbox. But on the other hand John’s Gospel leaves out some significant parts of the walking-on-water miracle as told in the Gospel according to Matthew; in Matthew, Peter also walks a step on water and is rescued by Jesus, but this elaboration is missing in our Gospel according to John that we read today.

So the facts indicate we have two different accounts of what are surely the same two miraculous events. The analysis of biblical scholars says the two writers were not copying from one another—they use different Greek words, they report different details, and the stories are placed in different timelines in Jesus' life: the Gospel according to John does not even report John the Baptist's death which directly precedes the report of these two miracles in the Synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but both observers—

John and the synoptics--do report the two miracle stories sequentially in their gospel accounts. The two events are independently reported but are connected, and thus usual ways of disproving stories as being either misreported or imaginary fall by the wayside.

Instead, we are led to the conclusion that indeed somehow at least five thousand people were fed from a small offering out in the middle of the desert wilderness, and also that the disciples actually saw Jesus defying the physical

laws of gravity and buoyancy by walking on water.

As I was pondering these two miracles, someone sent me a link to watch the YouTube recording of Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon in 1969. I know some here were born long after that event, so this is somewhat ancient history to you, but in general most people agree that the walk on the moon actually did occur. However, there are still some who think it was all a fiction created in a television studio, and a movie was even made to elaborate on

that idea. So it is always possible to find disbelievers. After 9-11 on every anniversary there is always a parade of several hundred walking down Broadway by Wall Street with signs that say '9-11 was a hoax contrived by the US Government'; so again, most every event past and current has its skeptics. And so the two miracle stories in Mark and John's Gospels are also considered less than true by some skeptics, but that is to be expected, as more contemporary events show.

The two gospel stories stand on their own as far as being true miracles, but one lesson I think we can learn is how to determine truth from non-truth. This is a challenge we will face all throughout our lives. One way the historic church has determined truth is whether some belief is biblically based. If something is postulated as foundational truth, does it agree with biblical accounts or not? And indeed, it is not at all uncommon for truths in the Bible to be twisted to affirm or disaffirm a specific theological point. A current point of departure is to

determine whether either Jesus or another apostle said this or that or did not say this or that and that omissions of one over the other can be used to determine theological positions. This is a common heresy that goes far back into the first century of church history called Gnosticism, which still thrives in the church when points of theology requires omitting certain biblical teachings or reinterpreting them as being temporarily irrelevant and thus not affecting us in this time and in this place. These efforts seem to thrive when cultures try to prove

their positions based on misinterpretations of historic biblical truths. In time, gnostic ideas subside, but they never really die out.

So, for instance, some detractors of the two miracles which are reported in John's gospel will either deny the miracles outright or say that Jesus had a special body that was only spiritual, and thus Jesus could do non-material things such as walking on water since his body did not have substance but was only divine. This particular gnostic heresy is known as Docetism, and it is still very

popular even in Christian circles. But to exclude folks who do not believe in Jesus as being fully man and fully God is also a heresy, as purity of belief is never an acceptable way of admitting people to become church members or for instance to take communion. But this heresy thrives today in the universal catholic church where hierarchies deny folks baptism or communion based on how they see others either obeying or disobeying their particular church hierarchies or ordinances. But to judge someone based on such flimsy

arguments is also part of the same docetic heresy. I would suggest that this heresy of Docetism is probably the most popular one around in our time and our place. When we require purity in belief we are not allowing the possibility of spiritual growth of others or of ourselves. As one wag said, “What part of ‘you shall not judge others’ do you not agree with?”

So we are left with the gospel miracles just as they are reported. Jesus was the Son of God, fully divine and fully human. He was present at the

beginning of creation, and he will be present at its end to judge the living and the dead. In between, we do not have any obligation to judge at all.

The one power of judgment however that humans will have in an eternal sense is to judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3 and Hebrews 1:14). As you may know, each of us has a guardian angel throughout our entire lives (Psalm 91:11 and Acts 12:15). If we live or die, we are that angel's charge—but we can never actually see our guardian angel. So instead we may have pets and imagine

that the way our pet loves us is how God and our guardian angel love us and look out for us. But indeed guardian angels can 'mess up', and we die too soon or we find ourselves too vulnerable to other humans due to our age or place in life. And that is our angel's fault, I believe. So, yes, I do judge my angel that way, but I cannot judge any other human being that way. God gets a bad rap if we die tragically and innocently, but that is actually the fault of our guardian angel. However, I do try to keep my guardian angel thoroughly immersed in the Bible,

as I read it daily and my guardian angel knows that, and I pray regularly, and my guardian angel knows that also, and I take Communion regularly. So I would advise that you keep your guardian angel on its toes by reading your bibles and praying daily and taking Communion regularly. That advice is for your own good. And if we begin to deviate away from our faith, we cannot really expect our angel not to do likewise. So we are in this life of faith together with our guardian angel, and I believe we are obligated to take care of our angel just as

we are expecting our angel to take care of us.

Guardian angels are mentioned several times in the Old Testament, for example Genesis 18-19, Exodus 32:34, Psalm 91:11, and Job 33:23-26, and in the New Testament in Matthew 18:10, Acts 12:12-15, and Hebrews 1:14, and also in the Deuterocanonical books of Tobias and Enoch. Pope John XXIII attributed the idea of calling for the Second Vatican Council to an inspiration from his guardian angel, which led to the

formation of our present Book of Common Prayer in 1979.

In the world of faith, angels are not able to receive physical things, angels are only spiritual beings, but they can still affect physical things through their constant communication with God who sent them to be with us--angels can only adore holy sacraments, but they cannot receive Communion or be baptized as can we humans.

Miracles are commonplace for God. God created us and all that we see, hear, and feel. The world was created by God

for our enjoyment, but we are not to profane it or anyone else. So how we show thanks for the miracles of food and health and life we have each day of our lives is the basic ingredient of living faithful lives for Christ, and we are each charged with spreading God's message of Christ's love to our world in our time and in our place.

Amen.

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