

November 17: Stewardship Sunday

Message: What Are You Looking For?

Scripture: John 6:1-71, various (CEB)

Text: "A large crowd kept following Him" -John 6:2

Memory Verse: John 6:35 "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

Blurb: We come to Jesus hoping He will help us in our messes. We want Him to repair a relationship, heal an illness, fix a problem, give us strength to face whatever we are going through. And He does. But Jesus offers us more than help. He offers us Himself. It is when we take Him fully that we receive the deepest healing and holiness. Come this Sunday seeking more than help from Jesus!

Opening Song: *Hymn Sing* -Andrew

Welcome: -David

Memory Verse: -David

John 6:35 "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

Worship Music Set: -Sanctify

Only King Forever

Reckless Love

How Great Thou Art

Worship Prayer

Grow Moment: Stewardship -Teresa Gruber

Offering: *Rejoice* -Sanctify

Kid's Moment: Peanuts Election -Andrew

Prayers: "The Lord's Prayer" -Andrew

Message: "What Are You Looking For?" -David

Prayer for Divine Inspiration: -David

Lord God, we come before you hungry in spirit. Feed us with your Word by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. In Christ we pray. Amen.

PP#1: What Are You Looking For?

“A large crowd kept following Him . . .” -John 6:2

What Are You Looking For? John 6:2a, “A large crowd kept following Him . . .”

PP#2: *Image of people offering Jesus a crown, but Jesus refusing*

So, I’m not preaching a series, and it’s kind of refreshing! I can preach about things that have captured my attention. Like, in my last series I preached on Jesus being the Bread of Life. But that comes in the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. And I noticed that when He did, the people tried to make Him their king. Did you notice that before? There’s another sermon there! So, today we’re going back to that.

PP#3: *Image for the health/vitality of a local church or visioning for its future*

Today we’re holding our annual meeting for our church after worship. We will be reviewing our year past, and vision for our year ahead. We’re asking ourselves as a church, “So, how are we doing?” We could answer that we’re engaging in powerful worship, that we’re gathering in grow groups, that we’re pressing into our strengths of intergenerational relationships, service outreach, and good fellowship. The Word of God is being taught, we are changing the culture of our church from maintenance to mission, that we’re now better focused on discipleship and spiritual growth. We have new families attending, and we can tick off the ways we’ve supported missions, service projects, completed some capital improvements, and have faithfully managed God’s money. We could also answer the question with some numbers, and report that our worship attendance is slightly down, membership has dropped a bit, but we’ve had good attendance at camp, retreats, grow groups, sent a mission team to Alaska, and our finances are in the black and our giving is up. So, to answer the question about our success rightly, we need know what we’re looking for.

PP#4: *Image for success in the world’s standards*

We usually think of success in terms of what’s visible and measurable. Those of you who work in the corporate world know the push of the bottom line. If the new CEO changes the bottom line from negative to positive, whatever policies the CEO implemented are regarded as necessary and good. Marketing, as we learned with our previous series, is driven by consumers, “You’ve got to give them what they want!” For the past 10 years the top three selling vehicles in the country are all pickups. Did you realize this? One in three vehicles sold is a pickup! They cost more; they waste gas; they are expensive to operate; they’re cumbersome and not very safe in emergency maneuvering; and most people will never use what they’re built for. But, for reasons of stigma and image, it’s what people want. It’s hard to argue with what sells.

Same with the church. To be successful means to grow, and to grow means we have to figure out what people want and offer it. If a new program brings new people in, obviously it’s necessary and good. So, the conversation is driven by, “If you want to attract new people, you’re going to have to give them what they’re looking for.” “You have to provide something appealing for their kids.” “You have to offer things they find interesting.” “You have to give better quality, more options, you have to look appealing.” “You’re competing with so many more options, so you have to offer bigger and better.”

PP#5: *Image for a very modern, successful church with lots of programs and options*

And, when we look around to other churches that have large attendances, we think they're doing it right, and we're not. After all, the Bible says our job is to grow the Church.

Well, I believe it does! And I've been wrestling with this ever since I got here 10 years ago. We've worked hard to be a church that's welcoming and that new people find relevant to their lives. We've made changes to offer Jesus in a way that makes sense and touches their lives. And, I have studied how our community is growing and has a huge unchurched population.

PP#6: What Are You Looking For?

1. God has a different view of success

So, why aren't we growing in worship attendance or membership? And I've had to ask us over and over again, "What are we looking for?" And I've asked, how the Bible defines success for God's churches. The Bible says that the Christian Church must grow and spread, reaching new people. But the Bible doesn't say do that by whatever works. In fact, numerical growth is not the measurement that God uses.

PP#7: What Are You Looking For?

1. God has a different view of success
2. Success is faithfulness

The means for growth, and faithfulness to the true calling of discipleship, is God's desire. God does want all the world to be saved, but that salvation can only be through earnest discipleship to Jesus Christ. Success—to God—is faithfulness, not increase in numbers. Yes, the Bible understands that numerical growth is an indication of faithful ministry, but any increase is fully the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, as pastor of this church, I've been trying to steer the question away from, "What will bring in more people?" to "How can we be faithful to the discipleship that Jesus is calling us into?"

And it's when I ask this question that I see this amazing sub-theme in the story of the feeding of the 5,000. It's not so much about Jesus' miracle as it is about rightly balancing popularity with purpose.

PP#8: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

1 After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). 2 A large crowd kept following Him, because they had seen the miraculous signs He had done among the sick. 3 Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with His disciples. 4 It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival.

Let's take a closer look at it. It's the whole of the long chapter of John 6. We won't have time to look at it all, but I'll try to highlight parts of the story.

The story starts out with Jesus being a celebrity. Crowds follow Him wherever He goes. Verse 1, "After this Jesus went [by boat] across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). *A large crowd kept following Him* [on foot], because they had seen the miraculous signs He had done among

the sick. Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with His disciples. It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival.”

So, it’s spring, on our calendars about the time of Easter.

“*A large crowd kept following Him.*” Wow, Jesus was a success! Look at His numbers! He’s doing something right! Jesus has become popular.

But notice that John also tells us *why* they were following Jesus. “A large crowd kept following Him *because they had seen the miraculous signs He had done among the sick.*” Jesus was giving the people something they desperately wanted. He had found a niche that resonated with the people. We can understand this...we are not all that different. We give the largest portion of our national product to health care: nearly 20% of our GDP, averaging about \$11,000 per person per year! Jesus is giving health, where nothing else was working, and for free! No one would argue with such a ministry. Healing people is totally good. And the crowds are growing. Success!

Well, notice what Jesus does. Jesus does not continue to meet their needs. Verse 3 says, “*Jesus went up the mountain and sat there with His disciples.*” He left the crowd behind. What? No, no. When all the people gather, that’s supposed to be precisely when you go out and “work the crowd,” you know, leverage your momentum. But Jesus forfeits it all and heads the other direction. He sits down with His few disciples, leaving the crowds behind.

What’s going on? Well, maybe He just needed a break. Even Jesus has to rest.

Even so, the crowd was determined. They seek Him out.

PP#9: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

5 Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward Him. He asked Philip, “Where will we buy food to feed these people?” 6 Jesus said this to test him, for He already knew what He was going to do.

7 Philip replied, “More than a half year’s salary worth of food wouldn’t be enough for each person to have even a little bit.”

8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, 9 “A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?”

Verse 5, “Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward Him. He asked Philip, ‘Where will we buy food to feed these people?’ Jesus said this to test him, for He already knew what He was going to do.” Jesus poses a question to Philip, to see if Philip can see yet beyond the physical...where, in the middle of a wilderness can the people get food...who could supply it? But Philip gets stuck on the money. Verse 7, “Philip replied, ‘More than a half year’s salary worth of food wouldn’t be enough for each person to have even a little bit.’” Not to mention, Philip, there’s no grocery store anywhere nearby, even if you had that money! Speaking of food, verse 8, “One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, ‘A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?’”

Jesus then goes back to His role of giving the people what they want, of providing for their needs. Oh good. It makes sense again. That conversation there was a bit weird, but it seems Jesus was just waiting for the right moment.

PP#10: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. 11 Then Jesus took the bread. When He had given thanks, He

distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. 12 When they had plenty to eat, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted.” 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.

Verse 10, “Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’ There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread. When He had given thanks, He distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, *each getting as much as they wanted*. [Way to knock it out, Jesus!] When they had plenty to eat, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted.’ [Notice, if you will, that Jesus provided *more than* they wanted, there was leftovers!] So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten.”

Jesus provides *above* your needs, *beyond* your wants. He is the compassionate One who feeds the hungry, the hurting, multitudes. Yes, this will preach. Are you hungry? Are you hurting? You need Jesus. Jesus is the one who fills, who heals, who provides more than your needs.

Now please, I’m not belittling this. I really and truly believe that’s true. Jesus is the one who provides for our needs, who touches our hungers and hurt. But this is really not what this story is about. Notice, this story does not end with Jesus feeding of the multitudes.

PP#11: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

14 When the people saw that He had done a miraculous sign, they said, “This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world.” 15 Jesus understood that they were about to come and force Him to be their king, so He took refuge again, alone on a mountain.

Let’s take a look at what happens next. Verse 14, “When the people saw that He had done a miraculous sign, they said, ‘This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world.’ [But] Jesus understood that they were about to come and *force* Him to be their king, so He took refuge again, alone on a mountain.”

Jesus’ approval ratings soars. The crowd goes wild! Line up the business administration students, let’s have them take a directed study with this Jesus. This is how to do things.

The people start talking among themselves: “This man should be king! Look what He can do! And He is such a godly man. If we made Him king, all our problems would be solved. And so the momentum swells. They won’t take “no” for an answer.

At last, the people accept Jesus! They choose Him. They decide to make Him their Lord. The Jesus movement is finally taking off.

But what does Jesus do? Again, Jesus slips away, back to the mountain.

What? Why did He withdraw precisely at the point when His coronation was being arranged? They choose Him as their king. What else could Jesus want?

PP#12: *Image of Satan tempting Jesus, asking Him to turn stones into bread.*

Do you remember, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, how He was tempted in the wilderness? Satan met Jesus and offered Him this world and heaven too. “Make stones into bread,” said Satan. Jesus refused.

Isn't bread good? Why did Jesus refuse? And why, when He fed people, was He so put off by their wanting to make Him king?

I think it's because Jesus was asking, "What are you looking for?"

In the wilderness with Satan, Satan was looking for Jesus to use His power selfishly, seeking His own glory. "Use your power to get what you want." At that point, bread became a problem.

And again in the wilderness, this time with the crowd, the crowd was looking for a Jesus who would simply give them what they wanted. Bread again became a problem.

PP#13: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

24 When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. 25 When they found Him on the other side of the lake, they asked Him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26 Jesus replied, "I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate all the food you wanted. 27 Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Human One will give you. God the Father has confirmed Him as His agent to give life."

So the disciples and Jesus head back home to Capernaum. Skip down to verse 24. "When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found Him on the other side of the lake, they asked Him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?'" Notice how again they are looking for Him, seeking Him!

"Jesus replied, 'I assure you that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs [meaning saw God's power and presence in Jesus and wanting to be a part of what God was doing,] but because you ate all the food *you wanted*. Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Human One will give you. ["Human One" or "Son of Man" is the way that Jesus talked about Himself as the Messiah.] God the Father has confirmed Him as His agent to give life.'"

PP#14: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

Jesus said, "33 The bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 They said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!"

35 Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ... 38 I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me. ... 40 This is my Father's will: that all who see the Son and believe in him will have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Jesus says bluntly that all they care about is getting what they want, not what God wants. In the next verses, they ask for a sign from Jesus, perhaps hoping for another free meal. But Jesus refuses, and instead tells them that He is the Bread of Life in verse 35. What the people need, He says, is not the miracles that He does, but that it is He Himself that they truly need.

Jesus is not looking to be popular and successful in worldly ways. Jesus is careful to keep His ministry focused on what the Father wants. He will stick to offering what He knows they need rather than giving them whatever they think they want.

PP#15: John 6:1-71 (CEB)

60 Many of His disciples who heard this said, “This teaching is difficult. Who can hear it?”

61 Jesus knew that the disciples were grumbling about this and He said to them, “Does this offend you?” ... 66 At this, many of His disciples turned away and no longer accompanied Him.”

Look at verse 60. Many of His disciples say, “*This teaching is difficult.*” And then look at verse 66. When Jesus stops giving them bread to eat and instead shifts His focus claiming that it is He who is their “bread from heaven,” many of them turn away and no longer follow.

Jesus let numerical success slip away.

Jesus was trying to get them to ask the question, “What are you looking for, really?” He wants them to switch from asking “What can you do for us?” and ask, “What do you want to give?”

As a church, as we assess the future into which Jesus is leading us, Jesus is trying to get us to ask this question, too. What are we looking for?

PP#16: What Are You Looking For?

1. God has a different view of success
2. Success is faithfulness
3. Seek who Jesus is to you, not what He does for you

You know, seeking what Jesus *does* is not bad. In fact, that is how almost all of us find Jesus. We are seeking His touch in some particular area or need of our lives. We’ve come today seeking help to make it through the week ahead, to receive inner peace, to receive guidance for decisions we’re facing. Notice in the story that Jesus gives them bread. He does heal. He does touch. But that is not what this story is about. Jesus calls us beyond our immediate wants, to ask Him to really satisfy that inner hunger of our lives. Jesus meets us when we ask for what He *does*, and then invites us to follow Him for who He *is*.

Notice that this story first starts out to be about the crowd: they’re seeking Jesus to give them what they want. But by the end of the story, it’s all about who Jesus is.

Same today. We come seeking Jesus today to get help. And, miraculously, we find ourselves touched. Before we are done, our stories become all about Jesus.

The bread of this story is a symbol that God Himself was among them in the person of Jesus. And that is what they really needed. Many chose to walk away. And although it made Jesus sad, He let them go.

Our calling as a church—our calling each of us as believers—is to choose to follow the Jesus that Jesus offers. He is our true Bread of life. As a church, this means that we must focus on discipleship, following Jesus when we get what we want, AND when we don’t. We seek ways of offering Jesus in the clearest, simplest, most relevant ways, ways that make sense to those who don’t know Him yet, but we do not seek success merely in numbers. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, often said that it is far better to have a smaller number of people earnestly seeking God than a lot of people filling the church.

Now, I am still praying for a lot of people filling this church. I have been for years! I hope you are, too! Eight years ago I asked a retired pastor’s wife here, Tulida Blackford—some of you may remember her well—“Why aren’t we growing?” She, in calm wisdom, said, “Just wait. It’ll come. That’s not up to you. And it’s not about the numbers!”

PP#17: What Are You Looking For?

1. God has a different view of success
2. Success is faithfulness
3. Seek who Jesus is to you, not what He does for you
4. Look for spiritual maturity

As we vision for our church, we will look at numbers. But we must keep our focus on inviting people into life-giving discipleship, following Jesus for who He is. We invite people to spiritual growth, to spiritual maturity, to holiness. And that is a path that many will not choose.

Today, when we gathered, the story was about us. We longed to have Jesus touch some part of our lives. But now, the story has switched. It has become about the whole of our lives receiving the whole of Jesus. Our wants fade away as we feel our deepest needs being fed.

PP#18: *Image for being transformed by Jesus, joy and true completion*

We leave, satisfied, different...but not necessarily in the way we expected or requested. We leave, with the stories of our lives, not about us, but about Jesus. And at last, we can stop our continual searching. We have found success!

Amen.

Closing Song: *Lift High the Name of Jesus* -Sanctify**Memory Verse: -David**

John 6:35 “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

Announcements: -David

Snacks
Church Conference 11:30a Packets
Lifeline - 6:30p
Wednesday meal & groups

Benediction: -David