

Gracious God we thank you for the gift of your Word and as we think on these things open our hearts and minds to hear your word to us.

Today's scripture passage begins with a question that could be read as nosy, a little disrespectful, and maybe even a little rude. "Rabbi, when did you get here?" After all, many of these questioners came to see and hear Jesus believing he was someone special. They wanted something from him, and were obviously anxious to receive it. They essentially chased him down from their previous encounter with him the day before. But what business is it of theirs, when Jesus had arrived?

Jesus, in his typical way of getting to the heart of their question, did not respond with a direct answer. Instead, he exposes their selfish motives declaring, ". . . you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." In other words, he accuses them of just looking for more food!

While Jesus often spoke to authorities in a firm, demanding voice, his tone with his followers was generally gentler and calmer. In this case, he almost seemed harsh and even a little sarcastic! I think he had reason to respond this way. It certainly makes one sit up and pay attention.

Earlier in this chapter, we read about Jesus feeding the multitudes with 5 loaves and 2 fish, then Jesus took his leave of the crowds, fleeing up the mountain, and then crossed the Sea of Galilee. I expect he was tired, and needed time and space to rest and pray. Did his fatigue cause him to speak so harshly? Was this frustration and impatience showing when these followers failed to understand his message? Perhaps. But as we continue

reading through this passage, we can begin to see a deeper truth that Jesus wanted his followers to hear, and that people continue to seek.

In their second question, his followers ask, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" They recognized the holy work Jesus was doing, but didn't really see it for what it really was. They had witnessed miracles, and heard Jesus speak, and wanted to know more about what he was teaching. They wanted to know how they could access that miraculous power. Jesus had provided them food for an evening meal of bread and fish – enough to fully satisfy their hunger, and had baskets of leftovers. How could they be assured that God would provide what they needed? What was the magic trick to make things happen the way they wanted?

When we look at the questions Jesus' followers pose, we see they are focused on what they could or should or must do to earn God's favour, rather than on what God is doing right in front of them. The Jews were looking for something they must do to enable God's work in their lives. Jesus must have some secret in order to perform the miracles they had seen and heard of. How could they access that secret? It's almost like they wanted to see a show – a performance of something spectacular. And then be told how to do it. This is what they saw as God's power; as the works of God.

I don't think we're so different than those Jesus-followers. How many of us have asked how we could make something happen. "How can I help my grandchild who is struggling with mental illness? How can I help my family to get along better? How are we going to pay the bills this month? How can I make this or that happen?" It almost seems like we're

bargaining with God: if I do this, will you heal my grandchild, bring peace to my family, find the money we need to get through the month. . .

Those aren't bad questions in themselves. Certainly, it's good to desire health, peaceful relationships, and provision of material needs, and it's good to ask for God's help with these. But perhaps the answers to our problems lie in deeper questions. Perhaps we're not asking the right questions and are looking for the wrong solutions. Jesus tells us, through his responses, what the better questions are, and what the better solution is.

Instead of presenting them with a list of things to do, Jesus spoke about a single "work of God." Notice the question posed by the followers refers to "works of God," (plural) whereas Jesus responds with "work of God" (singular). This work of God is faith. All God required of them is to believe in "him whom he has sent." Their work did not entail a list of things the Jews are to accomplish, or rules to follow in order to earn God's favour. There was no magic to enable God's miracles. The work of God is something which God does. Jesus reminded his followers that it was God who provided their ancestors with Manna in the wilderness – it wasn't Moses. Moses was a good man, yes, but it was his faith that enabled God to work through him. He wasn't able to perform the recorded miracles because he followed a prescription of prayer and fasting. God was the one who performed the miracles *through* Moses.

When Jesus speaks about Moses and manna – this bread of heaven which God provided, we are reminded of Holy Communion. There are obvious parallels to our celebration of the Eucharist. Just as Jesus was teaching his followers of their need to believe and accept

God's provision, so we are invited to accept God's love and provision in our lives when we receive the consecrated bread and wine. All we need to do is be thankful.

For much of my adult life, I attended a variety of non-Anglican churches. A number of years ago, I was drawn back into the Anglican fellowship by the connection with ritual and history, and by my father, who was a retired Anglican priest and had recently moved to Winnipeg. I remember one of those first attending an Anglican and witnessed the priest preparing the Eucharistic table. The priest was literally bouncing with joy to the hymn that was being sung. Granted, it was a fairly "bouncy" hymn, but it stirred something in me to see this priest celebrating so joyously. Not long afterwards, I learned that the prayer of blessing said over the bread and wine, is also called the Great Thanksgiving. That was quite a revelation to me, and it reminds me of the posture to hold when I come to the table: one of gratitude and thanksgiving for all Christ has done, and is doing.

I'd like to invite you to think of a time in your life when you have noticed God at work. I'm pretty sure each of you can come up with something, even if it's as simple as God helping you survive COVID isolation with your sanity (mostly) intact. You may have seen God help you with a financial situation. God may have brought reconciliation to a relationship that teetered on the brink of collapse. Some of you may have noticed the beautiful Hunter Moon this morning like I did, or enjoyed a bountiful harvest of garden produce. You may be among the thousands of people in Manitoba who can say, "I am a cancer survivor." When you reflect on these events or circumstances, you could just write them off as chance, or science, as though it were our actions which caused a good outcome. We could say, "I followed the good advice I was given. I was under the care of a caring and experienced doctor. I worked hard to make the other person understand." But those aren't guarantees, are they? Other people who have followed the same course have had

different outcomes. There isn't always an abundant harvest every year. But we can always find ways in which God has provided goodness to us, if we look for it.

These are the things which can sustain us through difficult times, and they are good reason to be grateful. Not just at Thanksgiving, but at all times of the year, because it reminds us of God's goodness and provision.

Jesus reminds us that it is God who gives us what we need – the bread of life. Jesus IS the assurance of God's provision.