**John 6:1-15**

1After 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, “Six months’ wages 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.

Bubble Wrap

As a pastor I often ask myself why some people come to church. Maybe you’ve wondered that about yourself, too. Maybe some mornings when you listen to me you wonder why I’m here, or maybe you think about that person sitting next to you (“Why is he here?”. There are lots of reasons people come to church. Many people come because they have built friendships over the years, perhaps from childhood, and this is where you meet friends every Sunday. Some may be looking to make new friends. Some may come to church for profit, believe it or not – I’ve met people who look at a congregation and see potential business profits, potential clients and customers. I used to work with teenagers and young adults in churches, and I discovered that one sure way to get guys to come to church was to have girls come to church. I’m not sure how attentive anyone was to my sermons, but the more women came to the service, the more guys came as well.

People came to see Jesus for many reasons – some good, some bad. Some wanted to be healed. Some came because they liked to listen to him. Some came to see if they could use him in some way. Today’s reading from the Gospel of John teaches us something about coming to Jesus for the wrong reasons. According to verse 2, “A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.” It doesn’t say that these people themselves were sick, but they saw the signs, the signs being that this Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior that they have long been waiting for. They were scouts, looking to see how well Jesus played. How was his curve ball, could he catch. They were scouting not for a pitcher but for a Messiah, a Savior, the One who the prophet had spoken of who was going to redeem Israel, and Israel needed redemption – they hadn’t won a game in nearly six hundred years. Now it certainly made sense in those days that one who heals the sick is a holy man; medical science was non-existent back then, and any healing that was wrought was believed to have been wrought from God, and thus the agent of the healing would be considered a man of God. And to a first century Jew living in Palestine, a holy man was a viable political candidate. There was no separation of church and state. A healer was holy was a potential leader and potential Messiah. And in light of the chaos that the nation of Israel had endured for the past six hundred years, the nation was primed for someone new to take charge, to be king. That’s why this crowd was following Jesus. And after Jesus produces a meal for them from a mere five loaves of bread and a couple fishes, that was all that was necessary to convince them that Jesus was the right guy. Jesus was like Moses in him procuring food from God by miraculous means. He was greater than the prophet Elisha who only fed a hundred men with 20 loaves (2 Kings 4). That’s enough to convince this crowd; they’ve seen enough signs to know that they have the right guy.

But where did he go? They’re ready to carry Jesus into the capital on their shoulders, and Jesus is nowhere to be found. What kind of Messiah is this? Doesn’t Jesus want to be king? Doesn’t he want to be the Savior of the nation? Why should he waste his talents just hanging around with a bunch of fishermen and healing country folk? He could live in a palace, enjoy all the accoutrements of royalty. He could be greater than David.

Remember David? We read about him today, didn’t we? The great King David who defeated all of Israel’s enemies, who built the capital city and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, who took another man’s wife and had the man murdered in a discreet manner. Wow! Things must have been pretty bad in Israel for them to want a new king like David.

Do you remember when Jesus explained to his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem and be arrested and rejected and killed and on the third day rise from the dead? Do remember how Peter pulled Jesus aside and said, “We won’t let this happen. We’re gonna fight for you, Lord.” Do you remember what then said to Peter? “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (Matthew 16:23).

The crowds who came to Jesus saw the right signs – Jesus was the person that they had been waiting for. But this crowd had the wrong expectations. They saw Moses. They saw Elisha. They wanted David. They wanted the kind of power that would overrun their enemies. Moses and Elisha were not great warriors. Peter had the same, wrong expectations of Jesus – that’s why he pulled a sword on some guy who came to arrest Jesus.

We too often have the wrong expectations of Jesus. Think for a minute about your prayers. What percentage of your prayers address your immediate needs or wants or desires? Your health, your finances, your job, your spouse, your children? Are you hoping to use Jesus the way the crowd wanted to use him, to satisfy their immediate needs and wants? If so, don’t be surprised if he seems to withdraw from you, if you get the impression that he’s not listening, that he’s hidden somewhere.

Had today’s lectionary reading from John continued, we would see that the crowd comes back to the other side of the sea, where they find Jesus again and he says to them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” (John 6:26-27). In other words, the real treasure is not the bread; it’s Jesus! I think of it this way; in Christ, God has given us his own Son, our Savior, and we would rather play with the bubble wrap that the gift came in. In other words, “You guys are looking for a quick fix for your problems (bread). This is not about a short-term solution; this is about an eternal solution (Christ). And it’s not about you; it’s about *me!* I am the bread of life (Jesus says in verse 35), and the bread I feed you will (that is, my body) satisfy your hunger for eternity. It’s about Jesus, the very essence of God who sheds his blood for us, whose body is broken for us, and through his resurrection, the doors of heaven have been opened for us! What an amazing gift! We’ve received the gift of eternal life, and we’d rather play with the bubble wrap that the gift came in.

Whatever the reason people come to Church, the gift that is offered here is Christ himself! need for healing or friendship or even a sense of purpose may be things you gain from the Church, but those things are the bubble wrap, and they are all temporary fixes – eventually you run out of bubbles to pop.

The good news is that God gives us what we need rather than what we want. That’s why it’s good that you’re here, in a place where you come to know in a deeper way the one true God, the One who loves us enough to give you what you need rather than what you want. Here you open yourself up to God by coming into his presence with a humble, seeking heart, one that yearns for God. Jesus affirms that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all is an awful lot! And while we may all fall short of giving our all to God, Jesus promises that those who ask will receive, those who seek will find, those who knock will have the door to God’s kingdom opened to them. And the Church is the place where you come to meet the One true God – out there, apart from the Church, the chances are too great that you will create your own God, that you’ll get distracted with the bubble wrap; by coming here you demonstrate that you are willing to seek God on his turf. We all do, and as the Church we open ourselves up to God’s mercy and love as well as to his correction and guidance and chastisement. As one body, we prayerfully and earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, because unless we seek God earnestly and collectively, we will be frustrated and disappointed. But when we do seek him earnestly and collectively, we will find Jesus!