

LAETARE (LENT 4)

March 31, 2019

Old Test: Ex. 16:2-21

Epistle: Gal. 4:21-31

Gospel: John 6:1-15

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Along with being called Laetare, today has been called the Sunday of Refreshment. The vestments move from dark purple to rose, and it's seen as a little break. A taste of joy in the middle of Lent.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

You see it quite often in movies and on television...

Some investigator, some researcher has procured a wall in their home or office...

Upon it they have plastered from floor to ceiling dozens of newspaper clippings, pictures, and computer print outs...

Then, taking red string—

(the string always seems to be red)—

they pen it in one place and stretch it out.

They pen it here, and pen it here, and pen it here,

until this touches that, and that touches this,

and all the various strings lead to one place.

This is how we might view our gospel text for this morning.

This miraculous feeding is not to be viewed in isolation from anything else, nor is it to be merely an example of Christ's power.

For it takes us back to the Passover meal—

of what that meal meant and why it was instituted.

This miraculous feeding is connected to Psalm 23,
of a Good Shepherd leading His sheep to lie down in green pastures.

Another red string connects this miraculous feeding to when Jesus says
“He’s the Bread of Heaven.”

And yet another string is connected to the time when the flour was multiplied
for Zarephath’s reluctant widow.

Our wall is covered with Biblical references and stories,
and all the strings—
all of these loose ends—
connect directly to our gospel text.

I mean, there’s a reason why this account is recorded
in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And though I’d love to look at every one of the connections—you know I would,
it is my joy, as well as my burden, to point out only a couple.

The first connection is obvious. It’s our OT lesson.

You know like I do, that the ancient Israelites were a bunch of grumblers.
Our OT lesson mentions they were grumblers no less than 8 times,
for every time they open their mouth, they’ve got something negative to say.
Know anybody like that?

You’d think after being delivered from Egypt,
the Israelites would be immediate to fear, love and trust God above all things.
But they didn’t.
Neither did they trust their pastors,
Moses and Aaron.

They demand, “Give us bread and meat—we trust in *that!*”
And the Lord does so. He graciously gives them *daily* bread,
with the promise of more tomorrow.
And so, like little birds,
they go out each and every morning
to gather what God provided.

But the command was to live day-by-day.

"Let no one leave any of it over till the morning."

"But c'mon Moses, there's no guarantee any of this 'bread' will be here tomorrow.

It's better to gather it and store it up."

So instead of believing God's Word, they gather more.

Which rots and stinks.

God disciplined them when they rebelled like this,
and forgave them when they repented of their rebellion.

We follow now our red string from manna in the wilderness to Jesus,
whose been teaching people all day long.

Mark is the only one to tell us, that to Jesus,
this gaggle of people were like sheep without a Shepherd.

It's not that they were leaderless.

They had an Emperor, a governor, synagogue rulers, even Pharisees.

But they had no one to teach them spiritual truth.

Jesus was willing to do so

and He would guide them into all truth

including the truth of eternal salvation.

So, at the end of the day,
the apostles ask Jesus to dismiss the crowds
to go back to the city and get something to eat.

But Jesus' plan...is to feed them.

Not because they were starving or because they couldn't afford it.

The provision of food was to point to something greater.

Jesus will even say, "Your forefathers ate bread and died but He
who feeds on this bread will not die."

Yet before making that spiritual switch to Himself,
Jesus turns to Philip, asking him, "Where are we to buy bread,
so that these people may eat?"

The text tells us—it's a test.

Jesus is looking for some sign of faith.

So, how should Philip have answered Him?

Well, he should have looked at our wall of evidence,
 and followed the red string
 stretching back to God providing manna in the wilderness.
 Philip should have said—
 "Jesus, You are God in the flesh...
 You don't need a field and seed and tractor,
 You don't need months of time, mill or oven.
 You don't need fleets of fishing boats, nets, and fish markets.
 Yes, Jesus, you typically use the middleman—
 field and farmer, boat and fisherman.
 But, if you want to cut the middleman out
 and deliver the goods directly to the
 people, we all know You can,
 just as You fed our forefathers
 with manna from heaven."
 Right on Phillip!

But that's not what he said, is it? Nor would we.
 Philip got out his pencil (lick) and started calculating.
 And after adding it all up, Philip's calculation is—
 "Jesus, bread for all these people...that is impossible."
 Not the wisest thing to say to the Lord Almighty.

Overhearing this, Andrew now gives it a shot.
 Andrew is not looking at what needs to be bought.
 Rather, he looks to what the Lord has already provided.

He finds the lunch of a Boy Scout, who clearly came prepared.
 But in despair Andrew laments,
 "What is this among so many?"
 Andrew fails the test too.

Jesus says nothing to Philip or to Andrew.
 He would simply provide what they couldn't buy,
 couldn't catch,
 and what they had not earned or deserved.

Like any Good Shepherd Jesus makes His sheep lie down in green pastures,
 where Jesus prepares a table for them.

Instead of calling bread into being out of nothing—He uses means—
that being the lunch from the Boy Scout.

He takes the bread,
gives thanks,
and breaks it—sound familiar?

Of course, it does.

Your ears are tuned to hear it.

Which is why another red string stretches from this event,
right straight to Holy Communion.

This is not quite the Lord's Supper,
but it certainly is a Lord's Supper,
and everyone is satisfied.

As if to underscore the point for the slow of heart to believe,
twelve baskets of leftovers are gathered up.

One basket for each of the disciples.

Understandably, the people want to make Jesus king,
by force if necessary.

And who could blame them—with fish on their breath and bread in their bellies?

Make Jesus king and put Him in charge of the food supply.

Appoint Him to be just like Joseph of old, back in the days of Egypt,
and we'll never be hungry again.

But Jesus resists this temptation, just like He resisted the temptations of the Devil.
Jesus resists this temptation so that He can be crowned, not with gold or jewels,
but with thorns.

Jesus resists this temptation so He can be wrapped, not in robes of royalty,
but in the purple robe of mockery.

Jesus resists this temptation to be an earthly king,
so that He can be exalted on the cross and be our Savior.

You know, regarding being an earthly king, Jesus told Pilate,
"My kingdom is not of this world."

Because Jesus did not come to take care of our bodily needs.

We—you—have a much greater need.

So, Jesus comes in flesh and blood
against accusers,
mockers and with suffering...
He comes to cross and nails and tomb...

Accomplishing what only He can accomplish.
Your forgiveness...
Your salvation...
Your eternal life.

You see, we don't need another earthly king—we need Jesus on His cross,
dying for our sins,
and that is exactly how we have Him.

So, on this Laetare Sunday, this Sunday of refreshment, we rejoice...
in that not only did Jesus resist the temptation of the Devil in the wilderness,
and resist the people who wanted to make Him king...
but after doing all of what He did,
He has gathered you here—this morning,
in the rich green pastures of His church,
where He has prepared a table for you.
And here you eat and drink in the presence of God,
and are filled to overflowing.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and
minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.