

# Sermon Series – John 6:1-15

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*Preached on the Forth Sunday in Lent (Laetare), March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

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## **Forth Sunday in Lent (Laetare)**

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 16:2-21

Psalm: Psalm 132: 8-18

Epistle Reading: Galatians 4:21-31

Gospel Reading: John 6:1-15

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### **You must know that Jesus is the Christ and His gift to you is food that brings eternal life.**

These are very interesting lessons we have today. In the Old Testament reading, God provides manna and quail in the desert for the Israelites coming out of Egypt. In the Gospel reading, Jesus provides fish and barley loaves for the masses coming to seek Him. As I was flipping through the television channels this past week, I happened to run across one of my top ten movies of all time. Everyone has their own list of top ten movies, so you may not agree with me that this movie is in your top ten, but *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* was airing. Please keep in mind that I am not referring to the 2005 movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, but to the 1971 classic starring Gene Wilder. As I was sitting there watching and enjoying the memories from my childhood, I was thinking about the readings for this week. In some ways, this movie has a similar theme to the Old Testament and Gospel readings for this week.

In *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, the lead roles consist of young children who are invited into this beautiful chocolate factory. This is certainly a rare treat for anyone, since the doors to the factory are typically closed to all visitors. From the moment they enter the chocolate factory, as guests, these children make fools of themselves. They repeatedly do what they are not supposed to do. The first child to suffer from his

foolishness is Augustus Gloop. Willie Wonka repeatedly tells the children “Do not drink from the chocolate river!” Does Augustus listen? No. Augustus goes over to the chocolate river and bends down to drink and *whoomp!* After falling into the river he is sucked up into a pipe and transported to be made into fudge. The next child is Violet Beauregarde. Violet loves to chew gum all day long. While touring the chocolate factory, Willy Wonka takes the children into a lab where he is experimenting with a gum that, when chewed, tastes like a four-course meal. Although Willy Wonka repeatedly tells Violet to not eat the experimental gum, she sticks a piece into her mouth and begins to chew. Upon reaching the dessert of the meal, Violet turns into a big giant blueberry and must be rolled into the fruit press room to have the juice pressed out of her. The next child is Veruca Salt. Veruca Salt was just a rotten child. While Willy Wonka is displaying his wonderful geese that lay golden eggs, Veruca demands a goose of her own. When Willy Wonka tells her that the geese are not for sale, she throws a tantrum because she has always received what she wanted. In the end, Veruca is measured by the egg-weighing scales and determined to be a “bad egg”. Thus, she is tossed down the garbage chute. You can see the repeated theme. All of these children were invited into the chocolate factory and presented with gracious, beautiful gift. However, they did not understand the gift that was being given to them. At one point, some of the children even resorted to stealing items from the factory. They never really understood what Willy Wonka was giving them. Willy desired to give not only the chocolate to them, but also *the whole factory*. They simply did not realize the bigger picture of his kindness.

This same theme runs through the Old Testament reading today with the manna as well as the Gospel reading today with the feeding of the five-thousand. In the Old

Testament, the throngs of people never realized the gift of life that God was providing for them. In the Gospel, the masses of people that came and saw what Jesus was doing never really knew him. They wanted a miracle worker, not a Savior for their sins. They had no idea what beautiful gift was being held out in front of their eyes. They thought it was food and, instead, He held out the gift of eternal life. He was providing true bread from heaven.<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel text picks up right after the beheading of John the Baptist. Jesus was performing miraculous signs, such as healing the sick, and the crowds witnessed his display of divinity.<sup>2</sup> He got in a boat and went across the Sea of Galilee.<sup>3</sup> The throngs of people ran and followed him around the sea. They were after him. They wanted more miracles. They must have thought that this man [Jesus] is amazing. He even heals the sick. As Jesus arrived across the river, He takes His disciples up onto a mountainside.<sup>4</sup> Mind you, this mounting is not like a Colorado mountain, but more like a grassy knoll. As He sat up there with his disciples, you can almost imagine that you are there looking out and seeing the people as they are coming around the lake toward Him. They are following and seeking Him. Jesus sees them, too. There are five thousand men plus women and children flocking towards Jesus and the disciples as they sit on the mountain. The total number of people is probably closer to 10,000 when you count the women and children.

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:26-59

<sup>2</sup> John 6:2

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 14:13, Mark 6:32, and John 6:1

<sup>4</sup> John 6:3

One may ask why there were so many people in the area. The Gospel writer gives us a clue with the sentence “The Jewish Passover Feast was near.”<sup>5</sup> These people are all traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three annual pilgrimages.<sup>6</sup> People from all around would walk to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Interestingly enough, during the Passover Feast the people would gather around and talk about God delivering His people from the bondage of Egypt. In addition, the discussion would also focus on how God fed His people in the wilderness with manna from heaven. During this time of great blessing following the Exodus, God fed more than five-thousand. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that there were six-hundred thousand men who were saved during the Exodus.<sup>7</sup> Still, day after day, year after year, God provided for them. After examining the background of the Exodus it is easy to see why Jesus chose this day to feed the people via a miracle of bread from heaven. Also, we can understand what is going on through the minds of the Jews as they make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Much like the time of the Exodus when the Hebrews prayed to be released from the bondage of Egypt, the Jews now wanted to know when they would be delivered from the bondage of Rome. This is the type of Messiah they were looking for. They sought a king who would conquer the Roman forces and set them free, hence, they wanted to make Jesus their king. Many people follow Jesus based on what they saw Him do (e.g. His miracles). The question we have today, our own question is: Why do we follow Jesus? What are we seeking Jesus for? Do we seek him as a lucky rabbit foot? I hope not. Do we only run to Jesus when things are bad? Do we only call on him when we need something special? Since Christ gives us everything we need, we should go to Him in praise every day.

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<sup>5</sup> John 6:4

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 16:16

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 12:37

Jesus and the disciples are sitting on the mountain and watching the people flock toward them. I am assuming that they are sitting around Him and He is talking to them, much like a teacher does. As the people begin to gather around and Jesus heals the sick, time goes on it is starting to get dark.<sup>8</sup> Jesus turns to Philip and asks, “How are we going to feed all of these people?”<sup>9</sup> I do not believe that Jesus is picking on Philip in particular. Perhaps Philip just happened to be standing closest. Philip’s response to Jesus’ question is, “Eight months wages, two-hundred denarii, would not be enough to even give each person a bite.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, Philip’s response is that there is no way to do it. It is impossible, Lord. The task cannot be done. These disciples have watched Jesus turn the water change into wine. They have watched Jesus cure the lame and heal the sick and yet, the answer out of Philips mouth is that it cannot be done. At least, Philip cannot do it. Jesus had compassion on these people and as night approached, His disciples wanted to send them away saying, “Let them go home and get something to eat.”<sup>11</sup> However, Jesus said, “No. These people are wandering. They are wandering around like a sheep without a shepherd.”<sup>12</sup> They have no one to tell them the truth. They did not have the Holy Spirit in order to understand what was happening right in front of them. They had eyes, but could not see. Even the disciples did not understand. Jesus asked this question to Philip to *test* him, much like He tests us. How many times have you said to yourself, “I am not a great evangelist. I do not think I could ever tell anyone about Jesus” and, low and behold, that very day someone comes up to you and asks, “I hear you go to church every week. Why?” This is a test from Jesus. He is testing you.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 14:14-15, Mark 6:35

<sup>9</sup> John 6:5

<sup>10</sup> Mark 6:37, John 6:7

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 14:15, Luke 9:12

<sup>12</sup> Mark 6:34

Do you have an answer? How many times have you prayed to Christ and said, “Jesus, I believe in You. You are my Savior. You are the greatest and I wish there was more I could do for you” and then someone calls you on the phone and tells you, “I am going through a terrible time and I do not know if I believe anymore.” This is a test from Jesus. Will you know how to respond?

Once again, Jesus is about to demonstrate His divinity. Jesus turns to Andrew and says, “You spoke about a young boy with some loaves and some fishes. Bring them to me.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus takes the food, gives thanks, and starts to distribute the bread and fish to the masses. Miraculously, everyone has enough to eat. As a matter of fact, everyone eats their fill and there is still food leftover. The disciples collect all of the leftovers. Five-thousand men plus women and children ate until they were full. This sounds a lot like our Old Testament reading. In our Old Testament text six-hundred thousand men, (probably equated to 1.5 million people – including woman and children) had enough to eat for all those years of wandering in the desert. I did a little research and found that someone in the United States Army was asked, “What would it take to feed 1.5 million people?” In other words, if you were going to feed 1.5 million soldiers, what kind of supplies would be needed? The estimate was: 1,500 tons of food to adequately feed them, 4,000 tons of wood to get fires for cooking blazing, and 11,000,000 gallons of water – per day! Is that a gracious Lord or what? I look back at Philip’s answer of that indicated it cannot be done. How can Philip be so thick? How can he be so dull? Every day God fed His people wandering in the wilderness without problem for forty years. The food was always there for them. Jesus fed these five-thousand people. These

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew 14:17-18, Mark 6:38, Luke 9:13, John 6:9

signs, or miracles, help us believe. They are not supposed to be magic or, as I said before, a lucky rabbit-foot. They are there to help us to see that this is the Creator of the world. This is the God who, out of nothing spoke the universe into existence. This same God fed the Hebrews for forty years with manna and quail. Feeding five-thousand people is nothing in the eyes of the Lord. And these people, the crowd as well as the disciples, witnessed another miracle right in front of their eyes. Once they witnessed this remarkable feat that only God could perform, did they believe and did they completely comprehend? No. Not yet. They knew Jesus was different. After all, the crowds said, "This is *The* Prophet."<sup>14</sup> I emphasized *The* because they are not saying that here comes another prophet. They were claiming that Jesus was *The* Prophet. The One the Old Testament has been telling them about. This is the One that had been waiting for. This is the One that was written about by Amos, Micah, Nahum, Isaiah, and Daniel. All of Scripture talked about Him. This is the One they heard about in the Garden.<sup>15</sup> The Savior, the Messiah who is to come. So what did they do? They wanted to grab him and rush him into Jerusalem and make him their king. They missed the point! If He is *The* Messiah, He can do whatever He wants. He can be King whenever He wants. He has laid down the plan at the beginning of time, so there is no forcing Him to do something He does not desire to do. These people should have been jumping up and down. They should have been saying, "Thousands of years we have been waiting for You. And now here You are." We live in a world today where most of us cannot remember the World Wars. In today's armed forces, soldiers talk to their wives and kids not on a regular basis, but much more often than they did in the World Wars. I have heard stories from

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<sup>14</sup> John 6:14

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 3:15

older people who talk about the time their spouse or son came home from the World War. They say things like, “I remember when your father came home from the war. I was doing dishes and I looked down the gravel road and I saw him walking up in his uniform. I dropped everything I was doing and ran out and down that road and met him.” Are we going to be like that with Jesus? Are we going to be like that when the Lord returns? Dropping everything we are doing and running to him? They had *The Prophet* and they should have ran to Him and said, “Whatever You say we are here to do.” Instead, they wanted to grab him and rush him into Jerusalem and make Him king. This was not part of the divine plan. As quickly and easily as He created the bread and fish, He disappeared.<sup>16</sup> How does one man withdraw amongst thousands of people like that without anyone noticing? It is not His plan. Jesus was not there to do the will of the people. Jesus was here to do the will of the Father.

The gift of the manna was not simply food that the people of the Exodus ate and survived. The gift was the true bread from heaven, which is the true gift of life. That is what was given to them. Yet, they refused to listen and instead filled their bellies. As the Old Testament text was read today, we heard that they tried to pick up more manna than they were commanded to.<sup>17</sup> In addition, they began to grumble after a while saying that they were tired of eating manna and wanted something else.<sup>18</sup> In our Gospel reading, the people ate the fish and ate the bread. If you continue to read on through the rest of the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel, you will find that Jesus calls them out

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<sup>16</sup> John 6:15

<sup>17</sup> Exodus 16:20

<sup>18</sup> Numbers 11:6

and says, “All you are seeking is to fill your bellies.”<sup>19</sup> The crowds did not realize who was in front of them. They did not fully comprehend what Jesus was there to do. It is our point of existence; it is our goal in this lifetime to truly know Jesus. We must truly know our Savior. Not just intellectually, but in our hearts and to recognize the true honest gift that He brings to us. Not bread that feeds our bellies – we are certainly thankful for the food that is on our table every night when we sit down and eat – but the true gift is the gift of eternal life. We received this gift when we have faith in Him and that is what these texts, both the Old Testament and especially the Gospel, are telling us. You must know Christ in your heart and recognize the real gift that He brings to you.

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<sup>19</sup> John 6:26

# SERMON OUTLINE

## INTRODUCTION:

**Homiletical Point:** You must know that Jesus is the Christ and His gift to you is food that brings eternal life.

1. Jesus takes His disciples onto a mountainside to view the large crowds coming their way. (v. 1-4)

Explain: Crowds *were following...were viewing* miracles...*he was performing* upon the sick.  
Crowds wanted a Worker of miracles – not a Savior from sin.  
5,000 men+ women & children (Penguin Hockey); small grassy hill  
“When shall we be delivered from Rome?” – Passover near; Egypt on the mind

Illustrate:

Apply: Many people followed Jesus seeking signs – Why do you follow Him?

2. Knowing their hearts, Jesus tests His disciples by inquiring how they will feed this great multitude. (v. 5-9)

Explain: Jesus met the crowd; He was filled with compassion

Philip: How are we to buy bread-cakes that people may eat? 200 days; (Show me your heart, Philip)

Illustrate: People wandering without a shepherd

Apply: Be aware of the people you meet in this life – are you being tested?

3. Once again, to illuminate His divinity, Jesus miraculously feeds 5,000 men and collects leftovers. (v. 10-13)

Explain: Boy: 5 loaves and 2 fishes *yields* enough for 5,000+ to eat with leftovers.

Illustrate: Exodus 16: Enough for 600,000+ men (1,500 tons of food; 4,000 tons of wood; 11million gallons water)

Apply: The miracles (signs) of Jesus help your faith in knowing He is truly divine.

4. Witnessing yet another miracle from Jesus, the crowds wondered if Jesus was the long awaited Prophet. (v. 14)

Explain: “The Prophet”; “who is to come into the world”

Illustrate: Waiting for a veteran of war to return – there’s nothing like seeing the walk up the driveway

Apply: You experienced this same feeling when you found Christ as your Lord.

5. However, they continued to misunderstand and long for the wrong purposes for their King. (v. 15)

Explain: Force Him to be King; Jesus vanishes away unnoticed; After physical fulfillment not spiritual

Illustrate: Exodus 16: Manna from heaven – your fathers ate it and died...I am bread that brings life.

Apply: You must long for the bread of Jesus Christ and not treat Him as a good-luck charm.

## CONCLUSION:

**Homiletical Point:** You must know that Jesus is the Christ and His gift to you is food that brings eternal life.