

“Bread, Fish, Storms, Signs, Symbols, and Hard Teachings”

Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – August 4, 2024

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that our hearts and our minds
might be opened to the nourishment of your Living Word. Amen.*

I need to give you a little background before I read the second scripture lesson. Mainline Protestant denominations like ours often use a tool called the Revised Common Lectionary, which is a schedule of scripture passages for use in Sunday worship that goes through a three-year cycle. Every Sunday include a reading from one of the gospels. Now, you know that there are four gospels, so you may wonder why the cycle is three years. It's a good question. And we're experiencing the answer today. The answer is that, first of all, the gospel of Mark is really short and can't really sustain an entire year. And the other part of the answer is that many of the passages from the gospel of John are really long and don't divide up that well, so some of them are combined into the lectionary year we generally think of as Mark's.

The lectionary actually invited us into the 6th chapter of John last week, but we were doing other things, so we're playing catch-up. But as I considered whether we wanted to focus on John this month, I decided that we would, but not the normal way. So instead of reading these sections separately over the next few weeks, I'm going to read you the whole 6th chapter of John today, and then we'll talk about what all is in there and which questions we want to explore over the next three weeks. [Read John 6.]

Outline parts of chapter (according to NRSV sections)

- Feeding the 5000
- Jesus Walks on Water
- The Bread from Heaven
- The Words of Eternal Life (Hard Teaching)

The “Bread from Heaven” section is really thick though, so let’s break that down.

- Confusion about how he got there?
- Sign or supper?
- Jesus’ bread VS Moses & manna?
- Mary & Joseph VS Heaven? – Jesus claiming particular relationship with God
- “My flesh and my blood” – squicky

So what are the questions raised by the different sections of this chapter?

- Miracles (fear/need) – how do we make sense of the text? How do we relate?
- Signs vs symbols – how do we integrate these ideas into our own faith?
- Body vs spirit (John’s biases) – separating grain from chaff
- Hard teaching – what is hard? Why do you stay?

Which ones are most compelling for you?