



# Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

## July 25, 2021

\* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "Holy God, We Praise Your Name"

Arr. Michael Burkhardt

### Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

\* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. All you have made will praise you, O Lord; all your faithful will bless you.

**All: We will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your power, so that all people may know of your mighty deeds and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.**

Liturgist: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

**All: We will extol you, forever and ever.**

*Psalm 145:1-3, 10-13 adapted*

**All Singing: 593 "Lord Most High"**

GOD'S GREETING

GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

**All Singing: “O My God and King and Savior”**

*Psalm 145*

O my God and King and Savior, I will bless you every day;  
You are great, beyond all telling, yet will listen when I pray.  
Ages past have sung your praises; now my generation sings  
of your glory, splendor, goodness, and to you its homage brings.

All your works speak of your kingdom, where you reign eternally,  
yet from where your great compassion reaches out to comfort me;  
and your saints on earth acclaim you, as your mercies they recall,  
knowing you will never leave them for you made and love them all.

God, you gave the hungry manna, now your church you daily feed,  
opening wide your hand and pouring gifts of life to those in need.  
Every day I'll strive to serve you, seeking neither wealth nor fame,  
only strength to speak your praises, and to bless your holy name!

*Children ages 4–7 may come forward for a blessing before they leave for “Children in Worship.”*

#### CHILDREN'S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

**All: And also, with you.**

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and loving in all his works.  
The Lord is faithful to his promises, and loving toward all he has made.

**All: The Lord upholds all who are falling, and lifts up all who are bowed down.**  
*Psalm 145:13-14, adapted*

Liturgist: Let us pray.

Lord God our Father, forgive us for thinking small thoughts of you and for  
ignoring your immensity and greatness.

Lord Jesus, forgive us when we forget that you rule the nations and our  
small lives.

Holy Spirit, we offend you in minimizing your power and squandering your gifts.

**All: Triune God, we confess that our blindness to your glory has resulted in shallow  
confession, tepid conviction, and only mild repentance. Have mercy upon us,  
we pray.**

**All Singing: “Trisagion”**

F. Ortega

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal One.  
Have mercy, have mercy on us**

Liturgist: The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.  
The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

**All: The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills  
the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.**

Liturgist: The eyes of all look to you O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time.

**All:** **You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.**  
*Psalm 145:14-21, adapted*

\* **All Singing:** **348 “Great is Thy Faithfulness”**

Liturgist: May God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him – so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

**All:** **This is the power God put to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.**

Liturgist: And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.  
*Ephesians 1:17-23, adapted*

## Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**All Singing:** **754 “Lord, Speak to Me that I May Speak”**  
*Singing verses 1,2,4,5*

Scripture: John 6:1-21

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

**All:** **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: Fed by Compassion

\* **All Singing:** **862 “Take Us as We Are, O God”**

## Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

## Sending

BENEDICTION

\* **All Singing:** **946 “Go, My Children, With My Blessing”**

Postlude: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Arr. Fred Bock

**Worship Leaders**

Pianist / Organist:	Dora Diephouse	Acolyte:	Dexter Thomson
Pianist / Vocalist:	Erin Pacheco	Liturgist:	Lisa Thomson
Guitarist:	Jenson Varghese	Prayer:	Zak Thomson
Violinist / Vocalist:	Bethany Keeley-Jonker		
Minister:	Arlo Compaan		

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7-25-21

Fed by Compassion

Arlo Compaan

John 6:1–21

Years ago, I really liked to have certainty in my life. I was concerned that my religious beliefs would be the correct ones, the right ones. When in Seminary, I focused on discerning the truth. In the coffee shop we would have friendly debates about whether Karl Barth was more correct than Friedrich Schleiermacher. I loved the pursuit of truth and correctness.

Now I find the mysteries in my religious life to be far more intriguing and inviting. The lectionary for today, the ninth Sunday after Pentecost, brings us one of those mysteries. The story is of the feeding of the five thousand, or the multiplication of the five loaves and two fishes. This miracle confronts us with a very profound mystery. Were we in the crowd that day, we would be captivated by the mystery of “who is this man?” Who is this very normal looking man who is able to feed 5,000 from five loaves of bread and two fishes? He has a reputation as a healer of the sick. According to John, he changed water to wine—really good wine at that. He healed the son of a hated Roman government official. At the pool of Bethesda, he healed many people. Later in this chapter he walks on water. Who is this human being? Is he like us? Is he different from us?

Centuries later Christians continued to wrestle with the question. Who was this man? He performed miracles regularly. He spoke with an authority that the money changers respected, that evil spirits, demons obeyed? Who was this man? Was he filled with a spirit, perhaps the spirit, perhaps the Holy Spirit? Or is he a crazy man? A Prophet of sorts? Some kind of holy man?

In trying to understand this mystery, the church created an even greater mystery. In the pantheistic Greek and Roman cultures, cultures with many gods, the Christian Church affirmed a belief in one God, but in three persons—A Father, a Son and a Holy Spirit. Three in one! Three persons, three people, three different identities—but one God. That is a great mystery. For centuries, the church attempted to explain and defend it in various creeds and confessions. Christendom could not come to a complete agreement on what was meant by this formulation. The Church had to learn to live with it as a great mystery.

You know the story, Jesus is crucified, rises from the dead, appears among the disciples and then ascends to heaven. A bit later, on Pentecost, the spirit is poured out upon the Christians. The divine spirit, the Holy Spirit, the third person of God, comes to dwell in each Christian, perhaps in each human being. Now we have two in one! Every person, every Christian is two in one. Another great mystery! What do we make of this? One person of God dwells in every one of you. Divinity and humanity combined in us?

Let me circle back to the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. Who was this man? The church came to affirm that he was both God and man. He was two in one. Neither was to be relegated or subsumed under the other. He was fully human and fully divine! Two in one.

When then Jesus preforms a miracle, how are we to understand that? What are we to make of that? I must say that most often, I attribute that ability to the fact that he was divine. And in making that assertion, I am also affirming that I am only human and that is why I am not a miracle worker. I might wish I were, but I am grounded enough to know that I have not performed miracles, and do not expect to perform miracles.

But I must say that sometimes I think that others do perform miracles. A few months ago, I felt that the neurosurgeon who drained my subdural hematoma, was a miracle worker. I couldn't believe how my abilities returned. I was sure he was a miracle worker, but he probably thinks, no I am not a miracle worker. I do that for people a few times each week. I am doing what I was trained to do. It is very scientific and very explainable, very human!

Transforming five loaves of bread and two fishes into enough food to satisfy 5,000, no science is able to explain that. We rightly call it a miracle.

But back to the question that Jesus' miracle poses. Is there a distinctive difference between the totally human and totally divine Jesus, and the Holy spirit-filled Christian? Both are two in one. Both are human and divine. Could it be that a few of us might be able to perform such a miracle? Could it be that what Jesus did in multiplying the loaves and the fishes, is in fact something that today, we humans are capable of? Something that we could do given the right situation, the right connectedness to the Holy Spirit within us? The Catholic Christian church does believe that. They believe that every saint has performed at least one miracle.

But you and I both know too, that beginning to act like God, or beginning even to believe that I am God, is fraught with many troubles. On psychological tests I would likely appear as psychotic and out of touch with reality. Certainly, inflated and flying high. I would be seen as having lost my groundedness in my humanness. Can't go there!

So, what might it mean to be "filled with the spirit," to be also two in one; human and divine; human and deeply spiritual?

Let's look a little deeper into the story. Consider the scene. Jesus has gotten a very definite reputation. This crowd of five thousand has heard of him and is walking miles around the Sea of Galilee to see him in the hope that he does another miraculous healing. So enthralled are they by this strange man, that they follow with a neglect, an abandonment of their humanness. They have made no provisions for their body's need for food. They are so ecstatic; possessed by the excitement of this miracle worker, this charismatic leader. We might say that a mass hysteria has gripped them and they follow blind to the hunger pains in the stomach. Jesus sees beneath the admiration, the accolades, the fascination, the curiosity. He remains very grounded and

sees that they are hungry. Jesus, the one who is human and divine, the two in one, is the only one who sees the physical need in their bodies.

It struck me, perhaps it strikes you too, that Jesus seems to be oblivious to the accolades and admiration, the near worship, of the crowds following him. In the story none of that dynamic appeals to Jesus. He seems not to see it and certainly does nothing to encourage it or even welcome it. It is of no interest to him.

I am reminded of Jesus' temptations in the desert. The devil tried his best to get Jesus to respond with a demonstration of his power, of his divinity. Jesus rejects all three temptations. He has no interest in self-aggrandizement, in self-promotion, in seeking the admiration and accolades of others. So here on the shores of Galilee, in front of 5,000 admiring neighbors, Jesus' concern is their hunger. He acts to feed them.

Could his attitude also be a miracle? A human being resisting admiration and the inner desire to be recognized, to be celebrated, to be honored. What is it that enables Jesus to stay grounded, to stay in touch with the body's hunger signals?

May I suggest that it is the compassion of his heart. Let me say that again. It is the compassion of his heart that keeps him grounded. Let's consider that a bit more.

Recently Rena and I discovered on Netflix the TV series, "The Kaminsky Method." We are into the second season now. The serial involves two old men—perhaps that is why we like it--, Sandi and Norm, doing their best to live as singles in their old age. Norm spits out these accurate, but venomous jabs at various people. They are often accurate but also hostile. They are often followed by a comment from Sandi acknowledging that Norm is deficient, defective or at least missing something of his humanness. What is clearly missing is any compassion for other's pain, and with it no sense of his own wounding behavior. It is a prime example of how the heart without compassion, the heart that does not know its own pain, is always both a wounded heart and a wounding heart.

In the story of the feeding of the 5,000, it is the heart of compassion in Jesus that takes center stage. He stays in touch with the bodies of his followers. He knows their hunger pains. And he acts to feed them, to satisfy their hunger. I suggest it is his divinity that keeps his humanity focused upon the compassion for the hungry crowd. In the same sort of way, it is the Holy Spirit in us that keeps us focused upon being compassionate for the wounded others.

Two things interest me about Jesus' compassion in this story. First, Jesus recognized their hunger, their pain. He felt it, knew it, honored it. He did not ignore it, deny it, dismiss it. Clearly knowing their hunger pains, he responded to them. I don't know about you, but I know that in my humanness, I forget often that every other person I know is a wounded person. You and I have learned to put on the good face and hide the real pain and the struggle. Facebook certainly does its part to strengthen that already human inclination. So, it is hard to keep in

mind that every person is wounded. I suggest it was Jesus' divine nature that enabled him to see, to feel, to believe that the crowd was hungry.

I have often felt and said, that in my book, one of the central requirements for being an elder in the church is that they know their own pain, that they respect and honor the pain that was and is a part of their life. I don't think that is in the official qualifications, but it ought to be. It is the awareness of felt pain, that enables compassion. When any of us, including elders, are in denial of our own pain, we, like Norm in The Kaminski Method, become unconscious wounders of others.

One of the recommendations I make to therapists I supervise is that finding in themselves something of a similar pain to what their clients are feeling is really core to their being compassionate, wounded healers. Feeling, knowing, remembering our personal pain is key to being a compassionate person. It is the Holy spirit, the divinity in us, that enables us to stay connected to our pain so that we live compassionately. I also believe that it is the experience of compassion that is the most powerful dynamic in all forms of healing, whether it is in Bible Study groups, prayer groups, or personal therapy. Advice and recommendations may be helpful, but if they are not surrounded by the feeling of compassion, they are only minimally helpful.

Finally, I wish to note here that Jesus' compassion, and our own compassion, are manifestation of the compassion in the heart of God. Our ability to show compassion in any situation is directly related to our connection to the heart of God. Our fallen human nature needs the energy of the divine in us to be able to stay in touch with our own pain, and thus to be able to relate with compassion to the pain of all others. It is the divine in us that pulls us back from denial of our and other's pain. A lot in us would prefer to go the route of the crowd—to find a savior whom we can admire and to whom we can look for salvation from our painful state. But the good life this side of heaven comes through the compassionate heart.

So maybe the real food in this story of Jesus, is not the transformation of the loaves of bread and the fishes, but the compassion of Jesus that brings healing to the crowds. Maybe it isn't really the helpful advice, but the compassionate hug that transforms and saves us. Maybe it isn't the struggle to know what is right, or what is the truth—as important as truth is and as devastating as falsehood is--, but the experience of a compassionate heart that is key to life.

Thanks be to God, that the heart of God, of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is compassionate and that God's compassion is what feeds the hungry soul.

Amen.