Mother Ann Murray

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Today’s Gospel reading describes two of Jesus’ signs as the writer of John refers to them)—the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water. Both signs should be fairly familiar as the feeding of the multitude is found in all four gospels and Jesus walking on water is found in three. Clearly, both are important to the Gospel writers who recorded the miracles of Jesus.

In addition to the miracles related in the Gospel this morning, there is a transitional sentence from the first to the second. In verse 15, we are told that “When 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.”

There are two important revelations in this sentence:

First, Jesus recognized the goal of the people diverged greatly from his true purpose. Second, he withdrew to the mountain to deal with it.

In the midst of performing miracles, Jesus is still vitally aware of the expectations that some had for him. Twelve step programs recognize, as Jesus did, that expectations are highly problematic. In fact, AA has a slogan—“expectations are premeditated resentments.”

The reason the people wanted Jesus to be king is because they identified him as the “Son of David”. In their view, Jesus is the long-awaited king to restore the Davidic dynasty. They were sure Jesus arrived to be a king who would defeat their oppressors and allow them freedom and power.

In fact, the first sign in today’s reading--the feeding of the five thousand was a king-like gesture in their minds. The person they were following was, indeed, providing for them just like a king.

Jesus knew that was not his purpose and he grieved that his people did not understand his message. Over and over Jesus shared and taught what the kingdom of heaven actually means. Often, the disciples just did not get it. Often, we do not either.

Jesus shared and taught his disciples in parables about the kingdom of heaven:

* The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
* The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
* The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field
* The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls

And many more. In these parables, Jesus tried to get across to his followers that the kingdom of God which he brought was one of humility and love—love of God, love of self and love of neighbor. He taught a new way to live—as caring and compassionate people, as ones who, in Bishop Curry’s words “believe that all humans are created in God’s image and equal before God – those who may be rejoicing as well as those who may be in sorrow.” He taught us that the first must be last and the servant is greater than the master. He told us that until his return it is up to us to see that the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, is made manifest on earth. The Episcopal church recognizes this in the covenants we assent to when baptized. We agree To proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves; to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

There are many ways to live out our promises found in the Baptismal Covenant. I think it is important to show up in person and take our time to help others. Douglas Adams is quoted as saying "To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity."

We can follow the example of Jesus and feed those who are hungry. We may not be able to feed five thousand but we are able to assist in various community food programs:

* volunteer at the Regional Food Bank,
* help with feeding the unhoused monthly by preparing part of the meal or working with others to assemble the meals

I hope that in the future we are able to work together to make a difference in the life of our community.

In the second part of the transitional verse, Jesus withdraws to the mountain to be by himself. Jesus retreats because he needs the time away to be nourished in his relationship with God, to refuel, to be—not having to respond to the immense needs of humanity. Here, Jesus is giving us an example of how it important it is for us to withdraw from the chaos and distractions of the world and spend time with God-refueling and being wrapped in the love that is always available to us but which we find more easily when we are still and able to receive it.

After Jesus retreats to the mountain, the disciples leave in a boat. Jesus becomes aware they are in trouble and walks on the water, calms the storm and guides the boat to shore. To me this sign assures me that Jesus is aware of the storms in my life and is always there—even if I am too overwhelmed to realize it.

At the end of the service I am privileged to send you out to love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. I truly encourage you to do just that.

Amen