

[MUSIC] I do have something to add to the weather spiel.

The last two Sundays, I've read later that those were the hottest global temperatures on record ever, the last two Sundays.

So you have all kinds of options about what you'd like to do with that piece of information, including being proud that you actually got here and you were in a non-air condition building and you're here to tell the tale.

But a word to our council, maybe we can start talking about building sustainability stuff and where we fit in the climate crisis.

I know the Senate has some resources.

So that's grossly unfair on me to say this in front of God and everybody, but there you go, maybe it needs to be something we talk about.

We begin the series from John's Gospel, The Bread of Life.

Preachers always freak out this time of year, man, it's like Jesus repeating himself, there's no way I'd get through.

I think the joke's on us, actually.

I came across a writer who is a pastor and a bread baker by profession.

And her perspective is wonderful.

She says that even though you're working with the same recipe and doing the same motions of integrating ingredients, the bread is always teaching you, that you're always learning.

And maybe it's not earth-shattering new stuff, but it's bringing you into more of a deep connection with what you're doing.

I think that is certainly true as we go through John's Gospel in these coming weeks, that you may not hear anything earth-shatteringly new.

But in going back and paying attention, there is something that the bread will teach us.

Speaking of bread, this is so delightful.

Our altar guild has prepared a different kind of bread for us today.

A loaf and a basket.

And we have to talk about baskets in Gospel readings, so that's exciting.

I just love the visual connection and the richness of that.

We are mindful that not everyone can eat bread that has gluten or wheat in it.

So we put a couple of the communion wafers in the basket too.

Now, I don't know everybody's story, so if it turns out that you are one of those who would prefer the communion wafer, please let me know.

The final thing to say by way of introduction to the service is that we have a guest preacher today, the Reverend Dr.

Diana Butler Bass.

She's not here physically, but her words will be the words that we hear in today's sermon.

I've decided maybe it was the Holy Spirit at work as I did my own preparations this week, and I read her sermon and I thought, "Oh, I would quote extensively from this."

And something inwardly said, "Well, rather than doing that, why don't you just let the whole thing stand on its own?"

So that's precisely what we're going to do today, is to hear her words on today's Gospel.

[Music] [Music] [Music] [Music]

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John, the sixth chapter.

After this, Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.

A large crowd kept following him because they saw all the science he was doing for the sick.

Jesus went up to the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the festival of the Jewish people, was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for all these people to eat?"

Jesus said this to test Philip, before he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get even a little."

One of Jesus' disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.

But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down."

Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so people sat down about 5,000 in all.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed to all who were seated, and also as much fish as they wanted.

When all were satisfied, Jesus told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over so that nothing may be lost."

So the disciples gathered them up from the fragments of the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten, and they filled 12 baskets.

When the people saw the sign that Jesus had done, they began to say, "Oh, this is indeed the prophet who has come into the world."

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.

When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the sea, got in a boat, and started across the sea to cavern him.

It was now dark, and Jesus had not come with them.

The sea became rough because of a strong wind blowing, and when the disciples had rode out about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, coming near the boat.

And they were terrified.

But Jesus said to them, "It is I.

Do not be afraid."

Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land to which they were going.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace and peace from God who liberates, God who feeds, and God who shows up.

The sermon comes from a collection of thoughts from the Reverend Dr.

Diana Butler Bass.

They fall under the winsome title of the cottage, from which she often writes many of her thoughts.

So if you're interested, that might be the place to go.

This edition is called Sunday Musings.

The preacher begins, "The lectionary is well weird this week.

We have been following Mark's Gospel this year, and had everything gone smoothly.

We would be reading the story known as the Feeding of the Five Thousand in Mark 6.

But for some reason, this reading cycle replaces Mark's version of the miracle with the one found in John.

Thus we find ourselves in John 6.

And oddly enough, I find myself transfixed by the first line in this story.

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.

There are a few lines, seemingly a throwaway remark by the author, that are more politically loaded in the entire New Testament.

And that single sentence frames up the feeding of the Five Thousand in a powerful way.

This is an anti-imperial text.

Why was the Sea of Galilee called the Sea of Tiberias?

This was a site of intense conflict between the Jews and their Roman overlords.

The Sea of Galilee was known in the Hebrew Bible as the Sea of Kenarets.

That traditional name was eventually replaced with the more widely used Sea of Galilee until the first century, during Jesus' own day.

In the year 20, the King Antipas, remember him?

The one who beheaded John the Baptist in the story a couple of weeks ago.

The one who was ultimately responsible for executing Jesus.

Herod founded a gleaming new city as his capital and named it Tiberias in honor of the Roman emperor, Tiberias.

He planned it to be primarily a pagan city, filling it with occupants from all over the region who were not Jewish, and building temples and shrines to meet their religious needs.

Religious Jews hated Tiberias and they avoided it.

Most refused to call the city by its new name and continued to call the site by its traditional name, Yamcha Keneret.

But Tiberias it was and the place was hard to avoid.

And the city grew to be so powerful that the lake formerly known as the Sea of Galilee became renamed the Sea of Tiberias.

To make matters worse, the city and its port emerged as an economic center for the globalization of the Roman fishing industry.

An extractive enterprise that exploited local fishers, raised taxes, and shipped the best fish to the richest parts of the empire and left only the scrappy remains to feed the residents.

Merely hearing the name the Sea of Tiberias was like a kick in the gut to Jews under Roman occupation.

The moniker was a daily reminder of their Roman overlords, their ruinous economic program, and their idolatrous paganism.

A couple of decades after Jesus died, Tiberias was taken over by rebels during the great Jewish revolt between the years 66 and 74 Common Era.

But it was eventually returned to Roman hands following the war and embraced imperial policy for the next century.

But in Jesus' own time, and in the years when John was written, this was a powerful imperial city with a contested history and a living example of the political and economic triumph of Roman globalization.

So, the intent of the opening sentence, "Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee," also called the Sea of Tiberias, is startlingly clear.

The author wants readers to know this location and its politics.

This story, such a nice tale about lunch with Jesus, is really about the contest between the Roman Empire and the kingdom Jesus proclaimed.

In the text, the point of Jesus' miracle is pretty clear.

The kingdom of God is a reign of gratitude, provision, and abundance.

The gifts of God are available to all who hunger, all can be seated at this meal, and all will be fed.

And there is more than enough.

Twelve baskets more.

The people loved it.

Who wouldn't?

Against the background of grueling, imperial-induced poverty with meager wages and high taxes and little reward, the miracle of multiplying bread and fish for everybody was the absolute best show in town.

This may have happened in a city named after a Roman emperor with a puppet king in charge, but who were those guys in comparison to this wandering prophet, rabbi, healer who supplied both lunch and spiritual entertainment at the same time?

Free lunch and a miracle on the side.

Although these were Jewish people, they probably understood the Roman approach to politics.

It was common practice for Roman emperors to gain favor with the populace by giving them free bread and offering extravagant public entertainment.

This political bribe had come to be expected through the empire.

If you were in charge and wanted to quell discontented locals, give them something to eat and some games.

It usually worked.

Eventually, around the year 100, the Roman satirical poet Juvenal coined a phrase to describe it, "Panum et surcensis," that is in English, "bread and circuses."

Bread and circuses.

This was one of the oldest tricks in the authoritarian playbook.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, it appears that a few people in the Tiberian Romanized crowd made the connections.

Jesus fed us and gave us a miracle too.

Let's make him king.

We want him as our Caesar.

Bread and circuses, because that's what kings do.

So, they hatched a plan to force him to accept the crown.

They'd rather have Jesus than Herod Antipas or the hated Tiberias.

Maybe Jesus would be a good ruler, a more generous authoritarian.

But Jesus walked away from power, at least the sort of power recognized by his world.

He rejected this imperial fate by escaping into the wilderness.

He might have been a bit thrown by the crowd's response, and he surely needed a new way to help his followers understand that the kingdom he preached was not like that of Caesar.

At the end of this tale, we see Jesus' followers adrift, again, on a storm at sea.

They must have gotten confused when Jesus turned down the offer to be king.

After all, that's what he preached, all that business about the kingdom of God.

They got in their boat without him.

Perhaps they were looking for him.

They had questions.

Lots of questions.

Where was Jesus?

And that's when a storm welled up.

Once again, the disciples were in maritime distress.

This time, Jesus walked across rough waters to save them.

Friends, he said, when he arrived at the boat, "I'm here.

Don't be afraid."

Maybe he added, "Let's land over there on the other side."

Trust me, and you won't be lost at sea anymore.

The kingdom awaits right on the horizon.

Can you see it?

The preacher imagines the disciples squinting at the shoreline.

Something was visible, but its contours weren't quite clear.

Because it can be hard to see beyond the bread and the circuses.

Amen. [music] [music] [music] (ARY IS ficou) ♪ All right, jump up to the shore,
come join me ♪ ♪ It's all over, don't know where to spawn ♪ ♪ I say so, but you can't
see me ♪ ♪ Jesus, sit us again, don't be afraid ♪ ♪ Jesus, sit us again ♪ ♪ Come on,
move away ♪ ♪ Jesus, sit us again ♪ ♪ Jesus, you are the greatest one ♪ ♪ And the
people who stand for us now ♪ ♪ We join you, we join you ♪