

I Want Something More

Proper 13, Year B – John 6:24-35

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 5, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

I've got a dirty little secret – I kinda like musicals. Not all of them, of course. I have always lived a long way from Broadway – both geographically and financially, so it's not like I stay on top of the Tony Award winning scene. And I suppose I'm a little picky with even the "classics." You might have read in the *Good News* that I went with Leslie and some of our youth to Castle High School's latest production of *Hairspray* a couple of weeks ago. I had a wonderful time, though I have to confess that I loved the company much more than the play. But in general, I'm a sucker for high school revivals of the old stand-bys, one very dark night to keep awake and to keep our sanity, my sergeant and I sang show tunes at the top of our lungs all the way from Dahran to Rhafa in the Saudi Arabian desert, and every now and then, *Some Enchanted Evening* gets stuck in my head and I end up humming it all day instead of my usual *Trust and Obey* or *His Eye is on the Sparrow*.

I went looking for the 1968 movie version of one of my favorites the other day, mostly because part of this morning's Gospel reading made me think of it. I warned you a long time ago that this is how my brain works and you're just going to have to hear about it every now and again. Because my video collection is divided between a couple of drawers here at the apartment and a big rolling thing under the bed in Clarksville, I was really glad that I remembered that the flick is part of the Netflix catalogue, so Jenny and I could watch it again yesterday. Actually, I watched it while Jenny mostly read a Danielle Steel novel, glancing my way indulgently from time to time.

We didn't have to get too far into it to get to the part I was looking for. In the opening scene of the movie, *Oliver!* we enter the dark and dismal dining hall of the Asylum for Widows and Paupers where we witness a parade of painfully thin young boys clutching their rough wooden bowls, as they shuffle along in lock-step to accept their meager ration, while singing longingly of "food, glorious food," which their disgusting portion of gruel is most definitely *not*. To make sure that we fully appreciate the nature of nineteenth century orphanages, and probably to take a bit of a twentieth century pot-shot as well, as the music reaches its climax and the grimy, ill-clothed and hollow-eyed waifs dance and sing their way to their tables, we read the enormous sign at the end of the hall declaring, "God is Love."

Following the pathetic meal, Oliver draws the long straw, and is thus singled out by his peers to do the courageous, the audacious, the unthinkable. He rises from the table, bowl in hand, and walks slowly to the front of the room under the glare of the ferociously forbidding, the profoundly rotund and obviously well-fed warder, Mr. Bumble. Holding his bowl aloft with trembling hands, our pathetic, angel-faced hero whispers hoarsely, "Please, Sir, I want some more."

I thought of poor little Oliver last week when I read about the crowds following Jesus in today's reading from John's gospel. By this time in his ministry, Jesus has acquired quite a reputation for the extraordinary, the astounding, the wonderful. Jesus has been stirring up the towns and the countryside with all kinds of miraculous deeds, turning water into wine, healing paralytics, walking on water. And now Jesus has outdone himself in a way the people can barely comprehend. In the wilderness the day before, he had taken a few meager barley loaves and a couple fish, and blessed them into a picnic lunch for several thousand hungry travelers – with twelve baskets of left overs. They didn't understand. As we heard last week, though I didn't get a chance to comment on it because of our instructed Eucharist, neither did the disciples nor the people understand what was going on – but they liked it. Everyone had eaten and everyone had been filled and everyone was *thrilled*.

But that was yesterday. And now today, the crowds are pressing in on every side, boldly following Jesus, chasing Jesus, pursuing Jesus literally over hill and dale... and *sea*. Having tracked him

down, they demand, “What else can you do?” “Give us a sign that we can wrap our minds around,” they say, “more of that bread and fish for *today*, or better yet, feed us with manna *everyday*, like Moses did.” “Please, Sir,” they beg, “we want some more.”

In many ways, I suppose I’m more sophisticated than those first century Galilleans. With all the advancements of modern technology at my disposal, unlike those people, I can pretty much get what I want, where I want it, when I want it. With all the benefits of living in the wealthiest, best fed society in human history, with the produce of the world brought as close as the bins and shelves at the *Sureway*, I never have the kind of hunger that those people probably did most every day. And with access to two thousand years of reflection on the words and work of Jesus, with a lifetime hearing the stories and their interpretations, with a seminary education, a theological degree and a little cross after my name, I suppose I stand in a much better position than they to understand the distinction Jesus is making when he says that, “the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” But with all the abundance, with all the education, with all the progress, I’ve still got a dirty little secret this morning: There are times in my life when I want to chase Jesus down and demand, “Let’s see what you got *today*.” There are still times when I want to say, “I need something a bit more tangible, some sign or some miracle.” There are times when it seems that the very best I can do is hold up my cup with trembling hands and plead, “Please, Lord, I want some more.”

But don’t you see? Our gospel lesson this morning points to a different way of seeing things, to a different way of life, to a different way of *being*. Don’t you see? There *is* more. There *is always* more. Time after time, when it seems the manna is gone for good, we look and find the ground covered again with the gifts of God’s mercy to us. Time after time, when it seems the feast is over, we are called once again to the table of the Lord to eat and drink and be filled. Time after time, when it seems our bowl is empty... it is filled once again – to overflowing, don’t you see!

That’s because we are not fed with perishable stuff. We are not fed with barley loaves and fish, or by twelve baskets of leftovers, or with manna from heaven. The bread we are given is not the product of a one time miracle. The bread we are given does not fade away with the heat of the day. The bread we are given does not leave us hungering for more the day after the feast, chasing after more the *next* day, *demanding* more the day after that. Because the bread we have, the gift Jesus gave us and gives us still in absolute abundance, is *himself*.

It is that unending, unfailing, undying bread upon which we feed. We don’t have to chase around to other side of the lake looking for the next hand-out, the next free meal, because we have a seat at the enormous banquet table of the Lord’s mercy. We are not sent out to gather just enough for the coming day, because we are given measure after measure from the endless riches of our heavenly inheritance. To us, as to those who had followed him asking, “Give us this bread always,” Jesus declares with arms opened wide, “I *am* the bread of life.” “Whoever comes to me,” he promised, “will *never* be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” We don’t live where “God is Love” is just an ironic slogan plastered to the wall. We live in the glorious light of a gracious and merciful and *loving* Father, ready and always waiting to fill our bowls with “food, glorious food” before we even know to ask.