

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, Proper 12
The Reverend D.S. Mote, PhD
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL
July 25, 2021
2 Kings 4:42-44
Psalm 145:10-19
Ephesians 3:14-21
John 6:1-21

Enough and Not Alone

Today after many weeks in Mark's gospel we find ourselves in John. And we will be with John not only today but for the next four weeks as well. Why this change from Mark to John for five weeks?

Author and scholar Alexander John Shaia instructs that "these five weeks coincide with the Northern Hemisphere cycle of August and the Celtic Feast of Lughnasa/Lammas." The Celtic Autumn season begins after sunset on August 1 and ends at sunset on October 30.

With the adoption of the Revised Common Lectionary by many churches, including the Episcopal Church, in the last few decades, we have returned to the rhythms of the church year each and every year and to the three-year cycle of readings from many centuries ago which was lost for a number of intervening centuries.

As I've mentioned a few times over the last couple of months, Mark's gospel was composed by and for a Jewish community of Jesus followers in the first century. They had been kicked out of the synagogues and were facing persecution by the Roman Empire. According to Dr Shaia, their key question was, "How do we move through suffering?"

John's gospel was composed by and for a new community of Jews and Gentiles who are following Jesus together, probably in the city of Ephesus in what is now Turkey. They are a new community doing a new thing: gathering around a table together without concern about anyone's bloodline or ancestry. It is unprecedented and truly amazing.

For this new international, multi-ethnic, multi-racial community, the overarching question according to Dr Shaia was: "How do we receive joy?"

To give a fuller sense of the contrasts between the intent and the tone of these two gospels, Dr Shaia speaks of "crossing Mark's stormy sea" and "resting in John's glorious garden." At least a little different, right? The tone of Mark taken as a whole is urgent and almost relentless. The tone of John overall is one of fullness and potency. That tone of John fits this season of late summer and the beginning of Celtic autumn: the season is thick and ripe. The fruits are abundant.

Last week's lectionary passage from Mark skipped over a bunch of verses, all the stuff that happened between one crossing of the Sea of Galilee and another and the crowds that swarmed around Jesus on both sides of the lake.

The stuff left out last week is the stuff we have this week from John, namely, the feeding of the 5,000+ and Jesus walking on water.

Both of these famous stories are quite similar in Mark and in John with some subtle differences. For example, in the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark, the disciples suggest to Jesus that he should send the crowd away so that they can find food. In John, Jesus asks the disciples, specifically Phillip, where they should look for food to feed all these people.

I could spend a lot of time parsing the differences between the accounts of the feeding the multitude and the water walking in Mark and John. For today, however, I don't find those differences to be what is most significant.

It seems to me that what is resonant in both Mark's and John's versions of these stories are the ways they lift up some questions that seem part and parcel of the human experience in all ages.

In both Mark's and John's versions Jesus, the twelve core male disciples, and at least 5,000 other people are in the middle of nowhere, and everyone is hungry after a long day.

In both versions, there are five loaves and two fish. In John's version it is Andrew who has identified a boy who has these foodstuffs. In Mark's version all the disciples seem to assess what is available.

The pressing human question seems to be, "Will there be enough?"

We often experience anxiety around this question. We often spend incredible amounts of time, energy, money, and other resources trying to make sure the answer will be, "Not only will there be enough, I will make sure, we will make sure there is massively more than enough." *We* will do it.

And yet study after study reveals that beyond a certain point, having more, earning more, doing more results in diminishing levels of satisfaction. There is a felt difference between "enough" and "too much," between "bastante" and "demasiado," between satisfaction and excess.

Next, walking on water. In both Mark and John, after praying alone up on a mountain, Jesus walks across the Sea of Galilee on the water to the boat where the disciples are rowing hard against an adverse wind. In both versions, the disciples are frightened when

he appears. They see him but don't recognize him and think he is a ghost. In both versions, Jesus identifies himself and tells them not to be afraid. In Mark, Jesus gets into the boat with them. In John, before they can take him into the boat, it immediately reaches the place they were going.

The pressing human question seems to be, "Will someone be with me? Will someone be with us?"

We often experience anxiety around this question, too. Will we be isolated and forgotten? Will everyone be too busy to check on us when we need checking in on? Will someone be with me? Will someone be for me—my ally, my friend, my advocate?

As the collect puts it today, God is our ruler and guide and helps us pass through temporal things, adverse winds of all kinds, in order that we may hold fast to things which are eternal.

It doesn't mean what's happening now isn't real and doesn't matter. It means nothing lasts forever except the love and grace of God.

I don't often quote my Mom in sermons, although I probably should do so more often. One of my favorite things she used to say was, "You check your Bible. It never says, 'It came to stay.' It always says, 'It came to pass.'" Storms can only last so long. God will be with us. Jesus will come to us where we are.

Will there be enough? Yes.

Will we be in want? No.

God is our shepherd. We shall not want. Or as today's psalm has it, "All creatures look to you, O God, to give them their food in due season."

Will there be enough? Yes.

Will someone be with us? Yes.

The Lord is our shepherd, watching over us, riding herd on us, helping us get along with other sheep.

Will someone be with us? Will someone be for us? Yes.

Will we be alone and face our trials without comfort? No.

There is enough. And we are not alone.

And I hope if you didn't know that when you walked into this beautiful space this morning or tuned in to this service from wherever you are, I hope that you now know that there is enough and you are not alone.

But there are many, many millions of people in God's beautiful and broken world who know neither of those truths. Neither that there is enough nor that they are not alone. If that's good news to you, imagine that it must be for everyone else.

And we as followers of Jesus in this era have both the privilege and the joy of sharing that good news with others in many ways and many forms.

If you have enough and if you are not alone, what is the Holy Spirit speaking to you to share that good news? God help us be like Jesus, our model in all things, to share and be good news.