

Proper 13 – August 5, 2012
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Shopping for Messiah

Last year I preached a sermon here based on a question Jesus asked his disciples at a turning point in his ministry. The question was, “Who do you say that I am?” A question that remains for **each** of us: What do we make of Jesus?

Today’s Gospel lesson offers **answers** to that question. It is a fascinating – I hope you don’t fall asleep – story of a Galilean crowd’s attempts to figure Jesus out and to make him **be** what they **want** him to be. They are, as the sermon is titled, “Shopping for Messiah,” but they have a **designer** Messiah of their own creation in mind.

Now, to see this shopping for a useable savior, we need to return to the scene of last week’s story and sermon about the feeding of the 5000, featuring St. Andrew, who found a boy with some bread and fish, and hauled him by the scruff of his collar to Jesus and persuaded him to give up his family’s lunch. Or **something** like that. I got a lot out of it. Really.

Anyway, the Gospel story tells us that when the people saw **the sign** that Jesus had done in **feeding** them all, with so much left over, they began to shout, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" They had in mind that end-times, Prophet like Moses, promised in Deuteronomy 18:15. In some Jewish documents that we have from Jesus’ day, that hoped-for Prophet had been **merged** with a hoped-for King like David, a powerful yet prophetic ruler who would deliver Israel. So it is no surprise when we read in John 6:15, that **Jesus** realized they were about to take him by force and **make** him king, so, he withdrew alone to the nearby hills.

“Who do you say that I am?” What brand of Messiah are we shopping for? What **designer image** are we trying to make Jesus conform to?

One answer was: “Jesus, we want you to be our **Prophet-King!** Work miracles for us, defeat our enemies, fight our battles, heal our diseases, make us **winners.**”

Well, that’s one answer, one designer style: Jesus as Super-Hero, **our** Super –Hero.

The next day, when the people who stayed after the feeding of the five thousand saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there anymore, they got into the boats and went across the sea to Capernaum **shopping for Jesus**. And they found him there, in the **Mall**, no, teaching in the synagogue. So, during coffee hour they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you **come** here?” “Or how did you **get** here? And why did you sneak **away** from us? We have big plans for you!”

But Jesus is wise to them and their manipulation. He tells them that what they are **really** looking for is not Jesus as he **is**, but Jesus as **Vendor** of another free lunch. “You saw what I did yesterday, but you did not see what it **means**. All you want is a savior you can **use**, to carry out **your** plans. What about **God’s** plans?” You want power, revenge on your enemies, pain-free security, and all the barley donuts and fish jerky you can eat. My feeding of the 5000 was a **sign** of something **greater** than that, something **deeper** and more important than political power and perpetual lunch.”

“Then what **should** we be shopping for, or, looking for, Jesus?”

Now that’s a **good** question. The key verse in our lesson today is 27, and it’s Jesus enigmatic answer: “Do not **work** (or shop) for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will **give** you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

In other words, re-order your priorities and re-write your shopping list, to **seek**, not what passes **away**, but what deeply satisfies and lasts forever. Go searching for the true bread, which, paradoxically, you don't have to search for at all, because God will simply **give** it to you. Seek, then, what I alone can give you, for I have come with God's full approval.

Then they said to him, "O work? You mentioned work. "Work not for the food that perishes." But what must **we** do to perform the works of God?!"

Now there are two ways to read what the crowd is asking. They could be saying, "OK, since you aren't going to give us what we want, so then, how can we do that bread-and-fish trick you did yesterday, that work of God, and others like it!?"

Or, more likely, they mean, "Work? Yes, we know about work, but you mean religious work, right? Good deeds and stuff, like the Ten Commandments, and all God's laws."

"Uh, no," Jesus answered them, "neither one. It is all so much **easier** than that. The so-called "work" that God requires of you is simply that you put your **trust** in me, **believe** in me, the one whom God sent."

"Oh, well, if that's how it is," the crowd replied, "then you've got to show us a **sign** to **earn** your credibility. We're not just going to buy **any** Jesus-come-lately. In fact, what have you **done** for us lately? That bread and fish trick; that was so **yesterday**. What's the premium are you handing out today? What can you do to warrant our confidence in **your product**? Look, Jesus, here's an idea: our ancestors ate **manna** in the wilderness, **bread from heaven**, that Moses gave them. Bread from heaven, not bread from barley or fish from the sea. Now that was something great."

Then Jesus said to them, “Hey! At least get the story straight. **God** gave the bread from heaven, not Moses. And right now, at this present moment in your life, in a synagogue in Capernaum, it is **God** who is giving you the **true** bread from heaven.”

“But how can this be,” someone must have asked him. “What do you mean?”

And so Jesus said, “The **true** bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life, not just to Israel, but to the **world**.”

“Ahh,” they said to him, “then, Lord, give us this bread every day.” “Give us this bread every day” - It’s almost quoting the Lord’s Prayer, isn’t it? “Give us this day our daily bread.” Lord,” the Greek here is *kyrie*, “Lord, give us every day this bread of life that you are talking about.”

And so Jesus said to them the first of his famous “I am” sayings: “**I am** the bread of life. Whoever **comes** to me will never hunger, and whoever **believes** in me will never **thirst**.”

Two chapters earlier in John’s Gospel Jesus had said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “Everyone who drinks of **this** water will thirst again, but those who drink of the water that **I** will give them will never thirst. And the water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” And like the crowd in John 6, the woman had said to him, “Sir, give me this water every day, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

But both she and the crowd misunderstand. The hunger and thirst that Jesus speaks of isn’t met by a daily coupon for a filet of fish and a Coke, or its cultural equivalent in any land.

But what Messiah are we shopping for? I hope it is **Jesus- as-he-is**, the One who offers us **himself**: to receive, to eat and to drink: bread of life and cup of salvation.

And so we **come**, to this table, trusting in Christ's merit and not our own. "And whoever comes to me," he promises, "I will never cast out."

The word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*" Amen.