

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT LAETARE

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

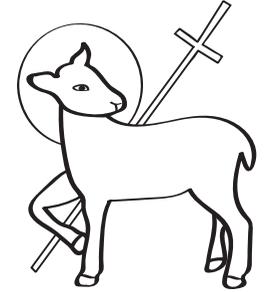
by: Rev. Weslie Odom



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John 6:1-15 ESV

Author and Date:

The Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23), receives these words from the Holy Spirit around AD 90. The text relates Christ Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000 men (not counting women and children) with two fish and five barely loaves.

¹ After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

- “After this/these things” – The events of John 6 take place sometime after the significant events of chapter 5, wherein Jesus heals on the Sabbath and makes it crystal clear that He is divine. It's this claim of Jesus that causes the Jews to seek even more after His life (see John 5:18). This desire for Jesus' death provides a stark thematic contrast to chapter 6, in which those following Jesus seek to make Him their king.
- “Sea of Galilee/Sea of Tiberias” – “Tiberias” appears only in John's Gospel. It is most commonly called the Sea of Galilee, though Saint Luke refers to it as the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

- “Signs” – Miracles, which are by definition contrary to nature. Though Jesus must ultimately reach Jerusalem for His death and resurrection, He was not in hiding or secretly teaching and performing these signs.
- It does not seem that the crowds were eager to hear of the Word of salvation. They had been following

Jesus because of His miraculous healings. Apart from the Word, a miracle, whether of healing or of physical feeding as here, avails nothing apart from temporary relief. Witnessing one of Jesus' miracles did not equate to having saving faith.

³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.

- “The mountain” – Though the Gospel notes that it was “the mountain” that they ascended, it isn't known specifically which mountain is referenced. This certainly brings to mind other events in Holy Scripture which occur at mountain peaks such as the giving of the Law to Moses, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the Transfiguration. It also certainly brings to mind the Epistle text for Laetare, wherein Paul teaches about faith and works using an allegory of Hagar (Mt. Sinai) and Sarah (heavenly Jerusalem).

⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

- The timing of the Passover places this miraculous feeding sometime in the early spring. This remark about the Passover and Jesus' words later in chapter 6 to the same crowd regarding the feeding of the children in Israel provide a key to understanding the fullness of what Christ is teaching through His miracles and preaching: God himself will provide a way out of this veil of tears. It will be through faith in the forgiveness of sins won by the shedding of the blood of the spotless Passover Lamb. It is this free gift that will sustain spiritual Israel all the days of their life and be the door to life everlasting.

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⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

- Recall Luther’s Small Catechism and the explanation of the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. God, indeed, tempts no one, but he does often, out of His divine, fatherly love, test his children so that their faith may be proved, refined, and strengthened. The testing of the Lord is a gift by which He keeps us in the one true faith until we die.

⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.”

- Philip is the first to respond to the test. He makes a statement of fact that there is not enough money or, as Jesus has noted, enough food to fill the bellies even a little. In other words, with man it will be impossible to feed the crowd even with a significant sum of 200 denarii (a large amount of money, which was Philip’s point).

⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”

- That Andrew responds at all with the report of the food found, but not in the way, for example, that Mary does at the beginning of John’s Gospel in light of lack of wine at the wedding feast. Mary responds in faith there; Andrew is unconvinced that anything can be done.

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

- Though the disciples are downtrodden after considering what they can do to feed the thousands, they nevertheless listen to the word of Jesus. Consider Peter’s words at Jesus’ insistence that they cast their nets after a laborious night of fishing with nothing caught (Luke 4:4-5)

¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.

¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

- This is not a miracle that teaches that Jesus can do a lot with a little. Rather, as Spangenberg says, we should consider this miracle in such a way, “to strengthen and confirm our faith as with a seal and covenantal sign, namely, that we believe that God will be no less sure to feed, provide for, and nourish all who believe and trust in Him and conduct themselves earnestly in their calling. For just as God clothes the roses and lilies of the field, though they neither spin nor sew nor labor, and nourishes the birds of the air, though they neither sow nor reap, so He has bound himself to nourish and sustain all those who trust in Him and attend to their vocation and carry it out in faith.” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 124)

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

- The kingdom of God is not of this world. Christ had not come down from heaven to be incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary in order to set up an earthly rule. Many of the people at the mountain saw and desired Jesus as they wanted Him, not as He had come for them to bear their sin and be their atoning sacrifice.



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