

Sermon  
9 Pentecost—Proper 12-B  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
July 25, 2021  
William Bradbury

2 Kings 4:42-44  
Psalm 145:10-19  
Ephesians 3:14-21  
John 6:1-21

One of the most honest yet disturbing lines in the Bible is in a reading from 2 Samuel, which is an alternate reading for this Sunday. It says: **"In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle...."** (David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites....")

**"In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle**

Warfare is seen as a natural part of national life—in the spring trees blossom, flowers bloom, and kings go to war.

It reminds me of that line from the 1979 movie "Apocalypse Now": Robert Duvall's character is a Lt. Col in the US Army in Vietnam who says, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning."

**It has been argued that warfare is the central act of any nation**—it is what galvanizes the people into a coherent unity so they can serve their nation.

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas makes the interesting claim that World War I "was the decisive moment because it was that war that finally healed the wounds caused by the American Civil War." War and the American Difference: theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity

He says **"War is a moral necessity for America because it provides the experience of 'unum' that makes the 'pluribus' possible"** in our motto **E Pluribus Unum—Out of Many One."**

I bring all this up because this is the reason Jesus runs for the hills after feeding the 5000 the loaves and the fishes: John writes: **"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."**

Jesus embodies the Realm of God by washing feet, feeding the hungry, and healing the sick. And at the end when he has to choose between killing others to preserve his “way of life”, or being killed and preserving God’s Way of Love, he chooses the latter---thus calling us, his followers, to take up our own cross, and join him in the way that leads to life and peace.

**For Jesus, the central act of bringing people together isn’t communal violence against a common enemy, but breaking bread with the stranger.**

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 The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is not just found in the appearance of more than enough bread, **but in the appearance of community among five thousand strangers.**

**Those men, women and children have no way of knowing if those who share their meal are Jews, or Jews who observe the purity codes and prepare their food in a kosher kitchen.**

**This meal is not just about the food, but about the fellowship—**

We remember his parable of the banquet in which everyone is invited and on his last night Jesus **creates a living parable around a sacred meal, so we will know how to practice his presence in community and make his kingdom visible.**

That’s why Saint Paul says it is a sin to eat Holy Communion without “recognizing the body”. He’s not talking about having the correct doctrine of the Real Presence, he’s talking about recognizing the sacredness of those around us—**recognizing Christ in our neighbor with whom we are breaking the bread.**

Jesus drew them together on the hillside and they experienced the Realm of God—the peaceable kingdom in which the lion and the lamb lay down together.

**It is an experience of the Divine in ordinary human living.**

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**But then they want to make Jesus King**—so he can command an army and go to war with its enemies—

So, Jesus escapes into the mountains and the disciples flee to the sea.

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**How many times has Jesus had to face his followers who want him to lead them into battle?**

In our country clergy were branded traitors if they didn't support the war to end all wars--which turned out to be the war that led to the Second World War.

I think here of Paul Jones, Episcopal Bishop of Utah, who in 1917 as the US is ready to join the fighting in Europe, protested joining that war. A commission of the House of Bishops appointed to investigate the situation, concluded that..."the Bishop of Utah ought to resign his office," thus **rejecting Paul Jones' right to object to war on grounds of faith and conscience.**

In the spring of 1918, Bishop Jones, yielding to pressure, resigned as Bishop of Utah. For the next 23 years, however, until his death on September 4, 1941, he continued a ministry within the Church dedicated to peace and conscience, speaking always with a conviction and gentleness rooted in the Gospel." Lesser Feasts and Fasts, September 4

**It is a wonder how often the Church has forgotten the central gospel witness that Jesus is a healer who feeds, not a king who kills.**

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 The Book of Acts says this practice of Jesus continues in the early church. "46Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, **they broke bread in their homes and ate their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all the people...."**

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 Paul prays today that the Church in Ephesus and in Methuen, will also catch this vision of **the inexhaustible supply of the food of God.**

He writes: "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."**

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**Our call, our duty, is to break bread with friends and strangers, so that together with them we will experience the peaceful presence of Christ in one another.**

**But not just in church—but in backyards, ball fields, and book groups.**

Back in 2017, my alma mater, the University of Georgia football team had an early season game against perennial power Notre Dame. Thousands

of Georgia fans made the trip to South Bend, Indiana and got to see a thrilling last minute, one point, win over the Fighting Irish.

But you know what those who went say they remember the most about that trip: **the welcoming hospitality and friendship of the Notre Dame fans in the hours before the game.**

**Jesus isn't just interested in a small thing like changing the Church.** No, he wants to change the world—change the world into that place where people **no longer have to go to war, because they've learned how to make peace!**