

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

A BETTER EXODUS

John 6:1-21

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Chris Repp

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' 6He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' 8One 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 among so many people?' 10Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11Then Jesus 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. 12When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' 13So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

15 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.

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, 17 got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

Author's Note: John uses the Torah, particularly the first Genesis creation account and the Exodus, as the interpretive framework for Jesus' saving work throughout his Gospel. Could our pericope be seen as a mini-Exodus, set up by the references to the creation and to Moses in chapter 5? John mentions the Passover in 6:3, and then, after the people are fed, Jesus delivers the twelve through the sea from Gentile territory back to their home. I'm going to go with that to try to pull meaning from these passages.

DIAGNOSIS: Captivity

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Helpless

We find ourselves in an untenable situation. We don't have the resources to help those in need. We're not rich. Even if we gave away everything we have, spent all our income on others, it would not be enough. We share the disciples' helpless attitude and their feeling of impotence in the face of the world's problems.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Terrified and Hard-Hearted

We feel helpless because we do not believe that God is still working in the world (see 5:17). We use the Bible as a talisman for personal salvation (5:39) and Jesus as a golden-egg-laying goose (6:15, 6:26), but really we fear, love, and trust not God (5:42) but the hard realities of the way the world works (6:7). We've come to believe that life is a zero-sum game. If others gain, we lose.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Doomed

We are in captivity to sin and cannot free ourselves. We stand accused by Moses (5:45) because we love neither God nor our neighbor. We love the darkness rather than the light who has come into the world (3:19), and so we row away into the darkness.

PROGNOSIS: Liberation

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Delivered

But God will not give up on the unfinished creation, and will not rest until the task is finished (5:17, 19:30). The light comes into our darkness (1:5). I AM* is with us in Jesus Christ (5:20). He is the paschal lamb whose sacrifice rescues us from the darkness of our own choosing and delivers from certain doom.

* "It is I" in 5:20 = "I am" in the Greek text. (See Exod. 3:14)

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Encouraged and Open-Hearted

"Do not be afraid," Jesus calls to us, even while we are still in the dark, even as we are being delivered. We are taken care of. We don't have to worry about ourselves, and so our hearts begin to open to both God and our neighbor.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Helpful

Trusting in the good news of God's presence and deliverance, we are no longer paralyzed by the challenges that confront us.

Freed from sin and fear, we respond in love to God's call to care for those around us, confident that that call is not in vain. In the new promised land no one needs to be displaced, and there is more than enough for all.