

Pentecost 10B (11B preached)
August 23, 2009
Hymns: 411 - 413 - 309/314 - 332

JOHN 6:1-15
STRESSED AND DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO?
***Remember Jesus Knows What He Is Going To Do.**
***Set Your Burden Down Before Jesus.**
***Step Out Boldly In Faith With Jesus.**
***Gain From Your Experience For The Next Time.**

Lord - Feed us with the Bread of life. Fit us for our daily strife. Amen (CW 580, v3)

Dear timid sheep and lambs of the Good Shepherd,
Do you remember hearing about a man recently here in Minnesota who clearly needs to choose another profession? His name is Rafiq Abdul Mortland. Mortland had committed a string of robberies, and fortunately for him, he was eventually caught. I say fortunately, because during his crime spree, Mortland received the nickname, "The Roloids Robber." The reason he received this nickname was that, while he was robbing a pharmacy, he repeatedly asked store clerks for antacid tablets. Mortland needed the antacid because of the stress that came from committing the robberies. Maybe he can relax now. He is serving a sentence of eight to ten years in prison. Any of you take Roloids, by the way? Don't answer that. Different people have different ways of dealing with stress.

(slide 1) Have you ever felt absolutely overwhelmed? Have you felt like walking away and just screaming--about your work responsibilities, perhaps? Or your financial responsibilities? Or your family responsibilities? When you think about the stress that many of us are carrying due to the slowing economy, that alone can be a little troubling. (Just a little something else for you to worry about.) Here is what researchers have found. It has been estimated that 90 percent of all doctors' visits can be attributed, directly or indirectly, to stress, to the feeling of being overwhelmed. Stress not only keeps us awake at night, it also suppresses the body's immune system, which makes us vulnerable to all manner of illnesses. We get sick--which may cause us a host of other problems related to missing work and the inability to fulfill other responsibilities--and that just leads to more stress. It's a downward cycle that rarely has a happy ending.

What do you do when you are feeling overwhelmed? What should you do when you are stressed and don't know what to do or where to turn? I want to suggest a simple formula taken from our Gospel lesson for the day from John. It is a story well-known to you all:

Jesus is on a mountainside with His disciples. When He looks up He sees a great crowd coming toward Him. He says to Philip, **(slide 2)** *"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"* Here is a situation when any normal person would be overwhelmed. It is almost time for dinner and suddenly they discover that they have 5,000 uninvited guests. Wait! That's just the men. Surely there are women and children as well--a veritable army. Jesus asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" They obviously didn't have 7-Eleven on speed dial. Besides it would take a full supermarket to feed that many people. John says that Jesus asked how they were going to feed the multitude only to test Philip, for He already had in mind what He was going to do.

Philip has no idea how they will feed this mob. He says to Jesus, *"Eight months' wages wouldn't buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"* Things look pretty dismal. There is no way they can feed all these people. At least, that is how it appears. Then Andrew speaks up. *"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"* Then Jesus says something interesting, *"Have the people sit down."* And that's what they did. They had the people sit down. Jesus then took the boy's loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated - as much as they wanted! He did the same with the boy's fish. When they all had enough to eat, He said to His disciples, **"Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."** So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the leftovers.

That's the story. So, how do you deal with overwhelming situations? Let me suggest some simple steps:

First of all, **(slide 3)** *Acknowledge that Jesus knows what HE is going to do!* God has a plan! I like the way a church sign said it, *"If your knees are knocking, kneel on them."* John says that Jesus asked Philip how they were going to feed all these people to test him, for Jesus already had in mind what He was going to do. God has a plan. God had one great plan from eternity. He wanted so much to have a loving relationship with men, women, and children like you that He decided to create a couple, whom He knew would turn on Him and sin. The heart grabbing part of the plan is that He did it despite what He knew would be the cost. You see,

from eternity He determined to send His Son to suffer and die for your sins and mine. That was God's plan! Do you think it caused Him stress? You bet! God the Father loved His Son! Do you think it caused Jesus stress? What does sweating drops of blood in Gethsemane tell you!? God had a plan. It was a loving plan, but a terrible plan for Jesus.

Now, do you really believe the God Who so loved you is unaware of your need? Do you believe that God, Who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, has the ability to meet your little needs for this life too? Then relax. God will provide. There's power in trusting God. The same God Who multiplied the fishes and the loaves that day long ago can give you the resources you need to meet your obligations. Sometimes we have to go through some painful situations before we discern God's hand in our life. We often can see God's hand only in the rear view mirror. But God is always there. God is always available. God's will is for our best good.

Relax. God has a plan. Sit down. I can just see Philip frantically running around, "What shall we do? What shall we do?" Jesus knew that panic never solved any problem. "Have the people sit down." Remember the weights' demonstration we did with the children this morning? The weight really doesn't matter. What matters is how long you try to hold it. If you hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If you hold it for an hour, you'll have an ache in your right arm. If you hold it for a day, someone will have to call an ambulance for you! In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer you hold it, the heavier it becomes.

And that's the way it is with stress. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. You have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. **(slide 4)** Whatever burden you're carrying now, carry it and set it down before Jesus. That may be the greatest thing yet about worship – whether in church or in your daily walk with God! It's a time when we can sit still and reflect, and listen to the voice of God. Jesus knew it was important to settle the crowd down. And so He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down." Mark adds the interesting detail that they sat down in groups of fifty and 100 (Mark 6:40).

You see, the problem with feeling overwhelmed is that we see our problems coming at us from every direction, and so it keeps us from solving the problem right in front of us. If we're expending energy worrying about all the things that lie out ahead of us, we cannot effectively focus on the task at hand. No wonder Jesus said on another occasion, ***"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"*** (Mt. 6:34). "Have the people sit down." That's where we begin. Sit down. Calm down. Focus on what's immediately before you. And take it to the Lord in prayer. Seek His will in His Word. You'll be glad you did – and less stressed!

Here's the third thing: **(slide 5) Make a beginning. Boldly step out in faith with Jesus.** Andrew came forward to say there was a boy present with five small barley loaves and two small fish. It wasn't much, but it was a beginning. That would give them something with which to start. Where are your fishes and loaves? Even Christ chose to start with what was available. What are the resources that you have today to make your situation better? Take an inventory. Get started with what you have right now. There are many people who suffer from paralysis by analysis--who worry so much about a problem that they never really tackle it.

Sometimes they can be very religious about this. "Well, I'm going to pray about this and when God gives me a sign, then I'll get started doing something about it." Friend, this Gospel text is your sign! Make a beginning. Worried about losing your job? What are you doing today to prepare yourself for the next one, should you lose yours? Who knows, if you get started today researching the possibilities you might find a better job than the one you have now. Worried about your finances? Have you ever gotten around to making that budget that financial planners recommend? There are many people today who are discovering they can live better on less. The point is to get started tackling whatever task is at hand.

Oh, I know this is easier said than done, but great things come from small beginnings. As someone has said, "Winning starts with beginning." Only two of five of my grandchildren can walk at this time. When they reach the point of being able to stand and wobble for a second or two, they will be ready to go. But they have to decide to put the right foot out first or the left. In their little minds they may even be trying to figure out how to put both feet out at the same time. When you are standing, it isn't a co-incident that you don't have to go through the mental process whether to start off with your left foot or your right. You just walk. Sometimes that is what God would say to you and me. *Quit analyzing the problem to death and get moving. I've already decided what I am going to do with your decision. You have sat down and talked to Me about it. Now make a beginning!*

And finally, **(slide 6)** “Gather up leftovers for the next time.” Chances are you’re going to make it through whatever problem is about to overwhelm you right now. The question is, what will you take from this experience? Gain from your experience for the next time. Use the Christian common sense God has given you. Christ instructed His disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” Why did He do that? I’m sure at least one of them was grumbling, “Why save the leftovers? He can just do the same miracle again tomorrow.” That’s not the point. Leftovers are important.

Whenever you go through a difficult experience you should learn something about how the world operates, and you should grow stronger in your ability to handle life’s difficulties. Each experience in life should make us a better person. That happens when we gather up the leftovers. One thing we are sure to discover is that we were right to trust God. That’s a good thing to learn to prepare ourselves for another time of testing.

On April 10, 1963, the nuclear submarine Thresher went too deep into the ocean and was crushed by the surrounding water. It imploded into such tiny bits that almost nothing could be later identified. You see, a sub needs thick steel bulkheads to withstand the pressure of the water as it dives. But there are few walls that can withstand the pressure of the deepest oceans; even steel gives way, as the crew of the Thresher tragically discovered. And yet isn’t it fascinating that, in those same deep waters where that steel submarine had been crushed, little fish swim without a care in the world?! What is their secret? Why aren’t they crushed? Are they made of some kind of indestructible iron? No, they possess only the thinnest layer of skin . . . The little fish, it seems, have an internal pressure that perfectly corresponds to the pressure from the outside. God gave them what they need to swim in the deep places.

(slide 7) And God will give you what you need when you swim in deep places. What do we do when we are overwhelmed? Learn from this beautiful story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Remember Jesus knows what He is going to do! Sit down and have a conversation with God about it. Let Him to speak to your heart through the Scriptures. You think you have problems? Last year we did a lengthy study on the life of David. For some it may have seemed to have gotten a little long. But in the months of our study, we covered years of challenges David faced. Some were self-imposed problems. Others he didn’t ask for. Some he dealt with well. On others he flopped terribly. Walking through the lifetime of David, we had opportunity time and again to apply his circumstances to our own lives. As you survive the bad experiences of life together with the good, pick up the leftovers! Use the experiences to prepare yourself for the next time you are tested. You are not alone. The same God Who multiplied the fishes and the loaves is with you! Amen.

(open Bible picture?)

***Lord, Your words are bread life-giving. On Your Words my spirit feeds.
Lord, Your Words will be my light Through death’s cold and dreary night.
Yes, they are my sword prevailing and my cup of joy unfailing. Amen.***