

**What are you looking for?
Vending Machine, Rock Star, or President?**

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Scriptures: 1 Samuel 11:1-15, John 6:1-21

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Scripture: John 6:1-21

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus 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. Then 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. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When 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."

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

Proclamation of the Word

One day a visitor from out of town asked an old rancher what the people are like in his region. The rancher responded:

"What are people like where you come from?"

"They are mean, sneaky, rascals," the traveler said.

"That's the way they are here too," the rancher replied.

Then another man came along and asked the same rancher the same question. The rancher again asked what the people are like where he's from. The traveler said, "They're great people, honest, kind-hearted, and high spirited." The rancher replied: "That's the way you'll find the people here are too."

Expectations reap results. We usually get what we expect to find.

A child, who has been seen to lack potential by some, is seen with new eyes by a fresh teacher who sees her potential, and a new child blossoms.

A worker is given different responsibilities, rises to the occasion. Others who knew him before are shocked.

Expectations sometimes create reality. If we expect the best out of people, usually we are right. If we expect the worst, we are usually right.

As we follow the travels of Jesus back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, the gospel writers are revealing more and more about who this Jesus is.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he has come, not to condemn the world, but to save it.

Jesus is the Lord of Life.

Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is like a small seed that grows into a bush which provides shelter for the birds and their young.

Jesus is King of different kind of kingdom.

Jesus sees the fearful disciples and calms the storm.

Jesus is the Lord of Creation.

He cared for the outcast, hemorrhaging woman and the little girl of the important official. Jesus heals the sick no matter who you are.

Jesus came to show us the mercy of God.

Jesus is a Healer.

With Jesus we do not always get what we expect. Usually, what we get with Jesus is better.

In the two scenes today from Scripture, we find Jesus, once again, revealing his purpose and his role. In the feeding of the 5000 men plus women and children and the walking across the water, Jesus could be seen as something he is not.

As the gospels reveal, a great crowd is pursuing Jesus because they have seen his "signs"- healing the sick. Jesus and the disciples have gone to the side of the mountain and they see this crowd. It seems Jesus has created a growing following. People want to be near this miracle worker, maybe hoping for a miracle of their own. The crowd is fed through the miracle of a little boy who shares his barley loaves and fishes- a reminder of God's grace- grace that is

shared. The people are fed, and God does care about physical needs and meets people where they are. In the second scene, Jesus walks across water only in view of his disciples- a reminder of God's glory.

Grace and glory. Jesus is once again showing us the very nature of God. Little by little he reveals that he is more than a healer or teacher. Jesus is God in the flesh. Now most of us know that standing on this side of Easter. Put yourself in the shoes of his contemporaries, and you will understand how little they understood about Jesus. The flocks of people have their own expectations of Jesus. Each one has their own needs that they believe Jesus can address.

Where I grew up the calendar is ruled by hunting seasons. Excitement builds as the opening day of duck or deer season approaches. The crowd hunts him down. It appears that Jesus is "in season" and all are abuzz with news of his signs. But Jesus tries to demonstrate that he is more than what they expect.

Jesus is not a vending-machine. Some want Jesus to be a never ending supply for their hungers and their hurts. And while Jesus addresses these real needs, Jesus refuses to be tempted to be all things to all people.

They hound him like a crowd pursuing a celebrity, but Jesus refuses to be tempted to be a rock star.

They recognize that he is a leader and they plan to nominate him for president. They have been waiting for a here-on-earth, living messiah, after all, who would serve them as King. But Jesus refuses to take political and military power.

Jesus has dealt with temptation before. He was tempted before when he began his ministry. Remember the forty days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan? Even Jesus had to keep his priorities straight and was faced with many temptations. Each time Jesus refuses to be tempted to be what Satan or the world wants him to be. He is God and has a particular purpose.

During the temptations, Jesus refuses the same three roles. In the first instance, Satan says to turn stones to bread. That would be a quick fix and all would be fed- problem solved. But Jesus refuses to be an endless vending machine of goods and services. Secondly, Satan proposes that Jesus do a trick to show off his glory and to throw himself off the temple to prove that he is the Son of God. Jesus refuses to do stunts to show off and to be tempted by celebrity attention. Thirdly, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and says "all this could be yours." Jesus is not tempted with power and possession. He refuses to be the political leader Satan wants. (with credit to Will Willimon for this parallel)

The crowds are looking for these same things perhaps, but Jesus stays true to his purpose. None of us is Jesus, but perhaps you, too, have felt the pull of so many voices around you telling you what they need you to be. It is a difficult

thing to know who you are. In your business, at school, in your community involvement or perhaps at home, many competing demands are vying each one's time and energy. Jesus is clear. He has come to show the world who God is, and the crowd, even the disciples, do not get exactly what they expect. Jesus refuses to be tempted to simply fall into our expectations. When the crowd clamors for more bread or more healing, Jesus leaves. These signs make them see that he is a prophet and they want to make him king by force.

Verses 14-15 states,

When the people saw the sign (of the feeding) that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who has come into the world." When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again the mountain by himself.

Jesus exits stage left. Jesus has left the building. Jesus has escaped the crowd.

Bono in Boston

To quote a U2 song, so many "Still haven't found what they are looking for." U2 is the wildly popular Irish rock band led by front man Bono. U2 and Bono in particular have used their popularity to bring attention to such causes as the AIDS epidemic in Africa. Bono has been special guest at the G-8 summit and led presidents in prayer. Their music is endowed with rich Biblical imagery and language. The anthem of so many in a generation is reflected in the words of the song, "I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For."

*I believe in the Kingdom Come
When all the colors bleed into one,
But yes, I'm still running.
You broke the bonds,
You loosed the chains,
You carried the cross and my shame;
You know I believe it.
But I still haven't found what I am looking for.*

The words seem to be summed up in the disciple who said, "I believe. Help my unbelief."

All of us see only in part. We will only see in full when the Kingdom comes and we meet God face to face in the end time perhaps.

U2 was recently in Boston. Celebrities who want to go out to the theater have to make special arrangements. U2 had rented out a whole theater in Boston. Unfortunately, news leaked out. The massive crowds had hunted them down. Their covert attempt to go see a show was undermined by a crowd clamoring for a chance to see or touch their celebrity. U2 was "in season" and had been hunted down.

Jesus faced that same thing. But Jesus refused to succumb to the crowd's expectations. As one writer reminds us,

“Had word gotten out that he was the celebrity savior everybody wanted, they would never had let him be the suffering Savior they needed.”¹

The Scripture says they figured Jesus must be a prophet. They decided to make him king- even if they had to use force. Jesus refuses to be hunted down by this crowd.

Plus, remember the Old Testament scripture reminds us exactly how human kings and political leaders are. King David is an adulterous murderer. Jesus is not willing to be an earthly king, although in their faith tradition, they are looking for the new Davidic king to rule Israel.

In classical theology, we understand the role of Jesus not as a Vending machine- a supplier of goods and services

Nor as

Rock star- who can do cool stunts and inspire excited crowds

Nor as

President- who has power to change the world through military might, by policy-making, or by being a dictator.

No Jesus resisted those temptations.

We understand Jesus to be a prophet...

A priest...

A king...

In a moment we will use the words of the new Presbyterian Catechism to affirm what we believe about these roles of Jesus.

“Jesus did not come to be what we expect or desire, Jesus came to establish a kingdom without military might or power. He yielded to that power in his surrender on the cross. He would overrun injustice by succumbing to it. He would expose the futility of violence by suffering its cruelty. He would win victory by being defeated. He would take away sin by taking it on. He would redeem death by dying.”²

At the end of our Scripture lesson today, Jesus has calmed the anxieties of his disciples in the storm. But the crowds are still hunting Jesus down. Boats full of people return to the place where so many were fed. When they cannot find Jesus, they turn towards Capernaum to seek Jesus. Perhaps they will not find the Jesus they are looking for, but they may find the only Jesus they need.

Jesus knew that eventually the crowd would catch up with him. In their limited understanding, the crowd would yell, “crucify him!” And Jesus would be escorted by the crowd to a cross where he would show forth his GRACE. But Jesus refuses to be boxed into our expectations or the confines of a tomb of death. Jesus is raised by the power of Almighty God to show forth God’s GLORY.

God’s GRACE and GLORY.

Jesus may be not the prophet, king or priest we expect or are looking for, but I hope you find the God in whom you can trust and believe.

¹Daniel Harrell, *Living by the Word; Reflections on the Lectionary*, in *Christian Century*, July 14, p. 21.

²Ibid.