

WELCOMING IN CHRIST
Monthly Devotional Reflections
Anticipating the St. Paul's Anniversary Campaign

JULY 2018

Season after Pentecost participating in the growth and development of the church
St. Paul's appreciation for core leadership by the laity

TEXTS:

John 6:5-14 *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."*

Ephesians 2:19-22 *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*

REFLECTIONS:

Summer picnics are never impromptu affairs; they usually involve careful planning and preparation. So when Jesus and his disciples attract a hungry crowd of five thousand, Philip and Andrew are dismayed. Only a little boy has brought anything to eat, and "what is that among so many." But the meager resources are offered. Jesus gets everyone organized, gives thanks to God, and with the disciples distributes so many loaves and fishes that everyone's hunger is satisfied and twelve basketsful of leftovers are collected. Other than the resurrection of Jesus, this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels. It reminds us about abundance and surprise—the nature of God and our anticipation of the heavenly banquet. Members of the household of God are welcomed and fed. The image of Christ as the cornerstone for how we grow and what we build is powerful. We are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens who have opportunities and responsibilities, gathering regularly as the church to worship, sharing wise leadership, generous financial support, and faithful service.

PRAYERS: Throughout the season after Pentecost and anticipating the 60th birthday of St. Paul's Church in September, may we remember the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others, offering daily prayers and service on behalf of God's welcoming community in our church and across the world. Let us be mindful of all who feel lonely, hopeless, and afraid. Let us seek and work for peace and understanding. Let us give thanks in prayers and with personal greetings for all the laity who are leading church programs—our vestry, teachers, cooks and bottle-washers, outreach coordinators, office volunteers, greeters, fellowship



sponsors, encouragers, and so many others. Let us hear God's invitation to more meaningful engagement with the parish as friends of Christ and each other.

Sustainer of the hungry, like a mother you long to feed your children until each is satisfied. Turn our eyes to you alone, that, aware of our own deepest longings, we will reach out with Christ to feed others with the miracle of your love. Amen.

ART: Who are these characters? Viewing their gestures and expressions, imagine what each one in the painting is saying and thinking? What happens next?

The Feeding of the Multitudes, Bernardo Strozzi, early 17th century Italian.
[Vanderbilt Divinity School Common Lectionary Resource]

ACTION: In *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen observes, "To identify the movements of the Spirit in our lives, I have found it helpful to use four words: taken, blessed, broken and given. These words summarize my life as a priest because each day, when I come together around the table with members of my community, I take bread, bless it, break it and give it. These words also summarize my life as a Christian because, as a Christian, I am called to become bread for the world: bread that is taken, blessed, broken and given. Most importantly, however, they summarize my life as a human being because in every moment of my life somewhere, somehow the taking, the blessing, the breaking and the giving are happening."

Pause for a few minutes each day to reflect upon how St. Paul's Church is bread for Cary and the world. While we worry about scarcity, God provides generously.

We are invited to assess/take what we have—money, time, relationships, spiritual maturity, hope, knowledge, love—all the resources for life and, after asking God's blessing, to break and give, sharing joyfully. How many might we feed? In what ways? Why are the four goals of *Welcoming in Christ* (new resources for fellowship, spiritual formation, mission outreach, and faithful stewardship of what we have) so vitally important to us?