



Something More

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

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A standing joke around our house has to do with those wonderful TV commercials for gadgets you wonder how you've ever lived without. You know, the ones that bury you with their pitch, astounding you with their product, then throwing in the kicker: "But wait! There's more!" Of course, at our house right now, the *more* in question is unpacked boxes...

The point of these ads is selling. The ultimate product, from a sales point of view, is one that sells itself – things everyone (well, at least a whole lot of people) wants so badly that they can't imagine life without them. There's a few of those around, but for the rest, you've got to convince people that they don't just want, they *need* what you're selling.

"Need", of course, can be a very broad term--it's awfully subjective. One of the early tasks of raising a toddler is sorting out the difference between "need" and "want." Come to think of it, it's probably one of the late tasks in adult development, too! When was the last time you had a heart-to-heart talk with yourself over whether whatever-it-was that caught your attention was truly a *need* and not just a *want*?

The trick of true salesman or woman-ship is getting past that self-analysis, getting to you say "NEED IT!" before the realization that you just "want it" sets in. There can be some significant disconnect between what we want, what we think we really *have to have*, and what is necessary to survive and thrive. Humans, at least well-fed and comfortable humans, easily get confused here. It is hard to convince someone who's used to sleeping in a comfortable bed in a nice house to go back to a studio apartment, let alone sleeping on a flat spot on the ground under a tree. Humans can *survive* on almost nothing; it seems to take a lot more for us to enjoy our survival. If you're questioning that concept, try taking away a teenager's cell phone, something that didn't *exist* when this church was founded, and listen to the sounds of life-threatening agony.

Then there's God. Funny, but God seems to know a lot about what we need. Could be something to do with being our creator, I suppose; but God still has had an uphill battle

trying to get people to focus on essentials. The early books of the Bible have some wonderful examples of this, but one of my favorites is in the book of Numbers, where after God has been providing the people of Israel with manna in the morning and quail at night, just for the picking up and eating – not to mention inexhaustible and accessible sources of clean water – the very people whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt start whining about how *boring* the menu is! Numbers 21, verse 5: “The people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? ...for we detest this miserable food.’” Typical.

The Old Testament is one long chronicle of humanity getting what they need from God, then deciding it’s not good enough; it doesn’t quite suit their tastes. Oh sure, we’ve got our land and our harvest, but we like those girls from the tribe next door, and their gods seem like a lot more fun...

Jesus has this in mind as he goes through the events of this day we read in today’s Gospel lesson. This great big crowd has followed Jesus out here to see him heal the sick. Jesus gives them a lot more than they expected: instead of healing a few, he serves them all dinner.

And that sure gets their attention. Nothing like a free meal to earn someone’s loyalty! They’re ready to buy into Jesus that very minute: swarm around him, put him up on their shoulders, and make him their King. Wasn’t it Herbert Hoover’s campaign that ran the slogan, “A chicken in every pot”? Jesus did more than promise; he delivered, even before they asked.

But there’s a difference between needs and wants. The crowd mistook feeling full for real fulfillment. Not hard to do, but not what Jesus was actually offering. The crowd sharing dinner that afternoon got more than they could have dreamed for, but they were happy because they ate. A full belly; well, anyone who can deliver on that had better be King!

Jesus walked away from this crowd of kingmakers, would-be subjects, for several reasons. In no particular order, first, he knew that their enthusiasm was based on having one need met, one time. That would wear off, quickly. They’d get bored – it happened before! As fallen human beings, we’re wired to expect an ever-changing and increasing supply of resources. Second, Jesus’ work was not just about getting through life, it was about a whole new level of existence. Feeding them bread and fish was just a start: he was planning to feed their souls – and ours – very soon. Third, taking advantage of their excitement would be manipulating this miracle for power, instead of just being a part of who he was, demonstrating his divine nature.

He did that personally. John, writing this, tells us that Jesus himself was the one distributing the food. And it’s quite clear from John’s narrative that no one participating in this miraculous event understood – or even noticed – what was happening until the very end. No one seems to have questioned why or how Jesus always seemed to have a piece of bread or fish for the next person in line, and it must have been one long line, there for a long time: think how long it takes us to serve communion here to a small

fraction of this crowd! Something amazing was happening, but they didn't see it as it happened; they were just there.

But wait! There's more...there were leftovers. Not only did he – did God – give them what they needed for survival, their “daily bread,” he gave them *more*. There was more food than they needed to be completely satisfied: Jesus is far more than “just” a king.

They don't see it, though – that's important. Hold that thought. There's more.

Later on, the disciples start off back to Capernaum, across the Sea of Galilee, without Jesus. Why, we don't know. And like our storm here in Green Valley Wednesday, a wind blew up suddenly, slowing their progress. It left them out on the water after dark, in very unpleasant circumstances. Jesus simply walks out to them, on the water, which scared the willies out of them – what would you think, if this were you?

Jesus speaks to them. We're not told what the disciples are saying – or screaming – to each other, now that they see Jesus, just that they're terrified. And here, in this moment, is something more; something more than you'll find in your pew Bible, because it isn't there.

What he says is, in our Bibles, “It's me,” or “It is I,” and “Don't be afraid.” What he says in the original Greek is, “I am. Do not fear.”

“I am.” That's not a simple identification, it's a statement, and a whole lot more. “I am.” That's the name of God, Yahweh, in Greek. And suddenly, instead of being in the middle of a storm, in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, suddenly they are at their destination, safe and sound. It doesn't even tell us that Jesus got into the boat! In the presence of God, they are safe, safe at their destination, safely through their journey.

Have you ever had one of those days when you felt you couldn't take another step, maybe even couldn't get out of bed, thinking about everything that has to be done, the weight of the world just pinning you to your mattress?

Have you ever got up anyway, got dressed, and gone out about your business – and found yourself doing all those things you dreaded – and more?

That's what God does for us in Christ. Jesus isn't here next to us, writing that report we have to do, or painting the living room, or sweeping the floor, or teaching that third grade class, not physically; but he is there in a much greater way: he's making it possible to get more than life out of life. A life open to God, to the winds of the Holy Spirit blowing through everything we do, is like watching a movie after seeing nothing but black and white comics strips, like the desert after the rains.

There are days when I'd be happy just to be fed, comfortable, and rested. But that's not enough for God. Plain survival is just drudgery, focusing on existing rather than life in all its richness and depth – *enjoying* life. God made us to be so much more than animals crossing off whatever number of days allotted to us; we are meant to enjoy God and this world and all it offers.

The crowd Jesus fed was ready to settle for just being fed, or at least they thought so. There are millions of people, true, who would be happy if only they had enough to eat. But God wants so much more for us, and part of enjoying life for us means helping them to get fed – and then offering them more.

Jesus Christ offers us far more than our needs; this is what the crowd missed. He offers us more than we can even want!

But wait! There's more! God's also there to help us settle the difference between needs and wants, to temper our wants. A huge part of enjoying survival is helping others survive.