



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, July 29, 2012
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

*Choral Eucharist
at 11am*

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Michael D. Spurlock

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NAILED TO THINGS OF THE WORLD

When Jesus feeds the five thousand on the mountaintop we should be quick to see the parallels between his action there and God's actions at an earlier time; time when his children were enslaved to a great nation. God delivers that people from bondage and begins leading them to a land of their own. God never said that the road out was going to be an easy one, the people would have to be ready, girded up for the journey, prepared to eat from a bitter plate and then be on the move.

This great exodus was not going to be easy and God never promised it would: what he did promise was that he was going to be with the people all along the way. There would be danger and scarcity, but he would lead them to green pastures. If they would follow him, and hearken to his voice they would lie down and rest in peace in a promised land.

But the people were so nailed to the things of the world that before they had even crossed the red sea they were longing to be back in slavery. They cried out, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have brought us out to die in the wilderness? Didn't we tell you leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?"

But they didn't die. God parted the sea before them. They passed through to safety on the other side. And then the waters closed in over their enemies and the people were free. So God leads on and after some time the food began to run out and they began to complain again. "Would that we had died Egypt when we did eat bread to the full; and now you have brought us into this wilderness to kill all of us with hunger."

And so God sent bread from heaven to fall upon these children of his who were so completely nailed to the things of the world that even when they received the food of angels they still complained "Is there no real bread for we loathe this manna."

By this time God's patience was sorely tested so he sent a plague of serpents into their camp and the only remedy was a bronze serpent Moses raised up in the midst of them so that whosoever looked on that serpent with care would be saved.

That was in the days of Moses. Now, into today's gospel, with an important anniversary looming Jesus does some particular things which bring to mind those days of old. He crosses the

sea and goes into a remote place. And because they had seen Jesus perform many healing miracles a crowd numbering in the thousands follows him into this wilderness of sorts. And Jesus asks a disciple, in this case Philip, “Where shall we buy bread so these people may eat?” He asks the question to test Philip, but Jesus already knew what he was going to do.

It’s no accident that on the eve of Passover when the Jews have their exodus near to mind that Jesus crosses the sea, goes into the wilderness, is followed by a multitude and must face one of the basest of human needs; a need for food. Someone is going to have to feed these people. The disciples turn to Jesus; he’s in charge; he’s the shepherd of the flock that has led them all out to this place. It is for him to provide pasture. Jesus knows that he is going to feed his people in the wilderness. And so when a handful of loaves are found along with a couple of fish, Jesus took them in his hands and gave thanks and gave them to the people. It was found that that little provision was not only sufficient, but was in fact more than the people even needed. They were satisfied and there was some left over. And the people said, “Now, this man is a prophet.” They are making the connection. Passover, the sea, we’re in the wilderness, he’s given us bread, as it were from heaven, this man is a Moses for our own day. They’ve got it... but then they don’t have it.

Jesus can see their minds turning and so before they have an opportunity to catch him and make him their king, using him for their own ends, Jesus slips away further into this wild place.

On the next day the crowd will find Jesus again and they will ask, “Where have you been?” Jesus will say, “You have been looking for me because you saw miracles and I filled your belly. You are still nailed to the things of this world. But there is something better, not of this world that has come down from heaven. You work very hard for things that perish, but I would have you work for that which endureth unto everlasting life.” “What is that work,” the people ask. “That work is to believe on me. I am the bread of life; I am that bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live forever. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not die but have everlasting life.”

Friends, there are so many things in the world to be nailed to both spiritual and material. Fear, anxiety, a sense of worthlessness, unfulfilled expectations or dreams, sins of commission and omission, work, money, food, things, things and more things. But all of that was supposed to have been nailed to the cross along with Christ. He didn’t go to his death empty handed, he went bearing all those things that we nail ourselves to, and he bore them in his own crucified body. We don’t have to be fixed to them anymore. We have been liberated. So why do we continue to nail ourselves to things, to live with a spirit of slavishness?

Well, I don’t know why we do that. But I’ll leave you with some good pastoral counsel I learned from a wise confessor priest. Once, having made my confession and asked for counsel he said, “Michael, just stop doing that.” And to date, that’s still the most effective counsel I’ve ever received in the confessional. I don’t know why we do it, but let’s just stop nailing ourselves to things of the world. Like the disciples in the boat, take heart, have courage. Jesus is the thing. Fix yourself on him and live forever and live free.