An Impossible Task, John 6.1-21

Pentecost 9B, July 25, 2021

Theme: Appointed

When I had finished my sophomore year in High School my family, including myself decided to travel to Mexico. My father was not one to take the usual tourist tours, but he, with my mother would research the country and develop their own travel itinerary. My parents wanted to visit the actual country and their peoples rather than just the usual tourist traps.

I have a clear memory of seeing the poor in the village streets. When we would stop to purchase food at the markets our American car would usually attract several children. I remember a boy of about 10 approaching me asking for some pesos so he could buy some food for his family. He seemed sincere and especially needy. I started to take some pesos out of my pocket to donate. My dad came to me and softly whispered in my ear “Don’t.”

Even though I was shocked at what my father told me, I was obedient and turned away from the child. It seemed completely the opposite of what I expected from my dad. I knew him to be a very generous person. He was a missionary, after all, who had spent much of his life serving the needy in Africa.

At my first opportunity I asked my father why I should not share my money with the child. He told me that if I gave him a few pesos soon more children would come and ask for money. He said that all of them would have just as great a need as the first. “What would have to share with the rest share of them?”

It would be an impossible task.

Every time I read this Sunday’s text; I always think of the experience I had in that Mexican village.

The text tells of how Jesus faces a similar impossible task. A crowd of people followed him and his disciples several miles away from the nearest village. There, he turned and spent most of the day teaching them. When evening came, they were still there in the countryside with no place to purchase food. Because of cultural customs the host is responsible for providing food. Since Jesus and his disciples were perceived as the leaders, they were responsible.

An impossible task.

A miracle occurred. After Jesus instructed his disciples to be distribute a few loaves and fishes, the entire crowd was fed, with baskets of food left over.

Often our congregation faces seemingly impossible tasks. Bills must be paid; people need spiritual support from pastors and compassionate members. Adults and children alike require opportunities to learn more about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. And, yes, people need to be fed. Every one of these tasks and responsibilities is an essential part of what a Christian congregation is supposed to be doing.

An impossible task.

But, somehow, by the grace of God, it can be done.

So what do you think? Was my father correct is stopping me?