

NJB John 6:1 After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee -- or of Tiberias- 2 and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he had done in curing the sick. 3 Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. 4 The time of the Jewish Passover was near. 5 Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' 6 He said this only to put Philip to the test; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough to give them a little piece each.' 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 9 'Here is a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that among so many?' 10 Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; he then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted. 12 When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing is wasted.' 13 So they picked them up and filled twelve large baskets with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. 14 Seeing the sign that he had done, the people said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' 15 Jesus, as he realised they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, fled back to the hills alone. 16 That evening the disciples went down to the shore of the sea 17 and got into a boat to make for Capernaum on the other side of the sea. It was getting dark by now and Jesus had still not rejoined them. 18 The wind was strong, and the sea was getting rough. 19 They had rowed three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming towards the boat. They were afraid, 20 but he said, 'It's me. Don't be afraid.' 21 They were ready to take him into the boat, and immediately it reached the shore at the place they were making for.

I don't think it will surprise any of you who know me that I like books. I like books as a diversion, as a means to educate myself, and as a means to do research for sermons and Bible study and for the book I am writing that I never seem to finish, partly because I am always doing more research *in books*.

The extent to which I like books might be grasped in part by this look at one of two similarly filled walls in my home office, and then this is a shot of a set of books I bought solely for research with respect to church and Bible, which were on yet another bookshelf that sits behind my weightlifting apparatus in my garage.

Because we are selling the house, I know I cannot hang onto all my books, and I shall probably offer many from my more general collection on a table in the Fellowship Hall for any who want to take from them; these will tend to be music and history and fiction, I suspect, probably some art books as well. I do not want to sell them, I just cannot quite bear the thought that Salvation Army really wants them or that they would end up in recycling.

There are many Bible and theology and church related books that I have already put in boxes that sit in my office here at the church, but I offered those two shelves of books in my garage in the photograph to any church or pastor in either of our Arizona presbyteries who might want them, and a minister in Mesa did want them, but I held back one volume because it had works of one of the early, what are called “Ante-Nicene’ — or “prior to the Nicene Counsel in 325” — one of the “Ante-Nicene Fathers” named *Origen*.

Origen, who lived in the late second and in the third century of the Common Era, as our numbering of the years is now called to avoid offending non-Christians, is an interesting figure. Jeff LaCroix, a Roman Catholic cousin of mine, wrote a fine novel, though I do not think it was published, about Origen, which surprised me since the Catholic Church frowns upon Origen, though I cannot remember exactly why.

At any rate, Origen has appealed to me since one of my first courses in seminary, a church and theological history course, in which his name popped up with a statement that he had suggested that stories in Scripture be considered *allegory*, a term a number of you know I enjoy, though I first learned it not in seminary, but in my senior year high school English class of which I have often spoken.

What is *allegory*? Well, it is the use of a story that may not-actually-be-true-as-told to present a moral or other point or an idea; the story may not be factual, but the moral or other point or idea is true; *parables* are really *allegories*, as, for example, might be an Aesop fable, or Homer’s “Odysseus,” or *Moby Dick*, or the Japanese film, “Rashomon.”

Origen’s reported suggestion of Bible stories as allegories really stuck with me, and I want to use it to suggest that both the stories of the “Feeding of the 5000” and a particular-to-the-Gospel-of-John passage following that feeding story are important *allegories*.

For centuries, people have sought to explain the “Feeding of the 5000,” that perhaps it was that people had brought food with them and were moved by Jesus to share, as one example, but perhaps the real meaning is *not* that Jesus performed a feeding miracle that one day, but rather that, *when we come to Jesus, we find the most important things for which we hunger, and we are filled by Him, and that what he offers us is limitless.*

We find *acceptance* though we might think of ourselves as unworthy; we find *forgiveness*, we find *encouragement*, we find *assurance that we are loved* — perhaps not loved by some humans, but loved by God!

And as I ask whenever we read of Jesus’ walking on the water to come to his disciples who are on a boat during a storm, as we and I did several weeks back, what is important, that 2000 years ago Jesus walked on water in a storm, or that Jesus comes to us across the troubled waters of our lives *here and now?*

Are these “walking on water stories” not *allegories*?

And so what is important, that Jesus provided more than enough food to fill 5000 people 2000 years ago, or that Jesus can provide fulfillment to all who hunger *today?*

I like to think the answer is obvious; even if intended by the original Gospel writers so to do, these stories are not to awe us with past miracles; these stories are *allegories* that have meaning to us *today.*

But today’s reading from the Gospel of John’s telling of the “Feeding of the 5000” has a further interesting passage:

The wind was strong, and the sea was getting rough. They had rowed three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming towards the boat. They were afraid, but he said, 'It's me. Don't be afraid.' They were ready to

take him into the boat, and immediately it reached the shore at the place they were making for.

Another instance of “walking on water” to be sure, but let’s focus on that last sentence:

They were ready to take him into the boat, and immediately it reached the shore at the place they were making for.

*The place they were making for . . .* I’m not sure whether they — whether we — exactly know for sure for where we are — or they were — making, but at least in a theological sense, we are *making for* the Kingdom of God: — put another way, we are *making for eternal life*, and to have the allegory work, we are *making for heaven’s shores*.

And I believe those lines are an *allegory* that is telling us that *when* we let Jesus “onto the boat” — or perhaps I should say, “when we get into the boat with Jesus,” — *when* we let Jesus into our lives, not at some future eschatological event, we arrive, or at least are on course to where we are making for, and we can enjoy the ride there.

I have to admit that when I came up with the title for my message that appears in your bulletins this morning, I had ignored that word *immediately* and was concentrating on the idea that we are now on a boat riding with Jesus to our destination. And in a real sense, so we are.

And while I do not want to back away from that, let me make this point. Although most of this church year’s Gospel lessons are from the Gospel According to Mark, today’s lesson is from the Gospel according to John, a Gospel version in which Jesus through the writer suggests that *eternal life* does not require death. In John, Jesus indicates that when we accept Him, when we seek to follow Jesus, eternal life has begun. This does not mean that death is not a meaningful event, but as I say at funerals and memorial services and celebrations, physical death is not an end, it is a *transition*; we do not need to die to begin eternal life.

So in another sense, we do not need to reach “the place they [or we] were making for” to begin to experience that for which we were searching, not when Jesus is with us and we are aware that He is with us.

Know that He is with you, and that while you might not see a distant shore, with Him you shall get there, indeed, you have already cleared immigration and customs.

That latter part’s an allegory as well.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.