

## SERMON- Proper 12 (B) BAPTISM

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2 Samuel 11:1-15

Psalms 14

Ephesians 3:14-21

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

July 28, 2024

John 6:1-21

### OPENING:

A story about one of our baptismal candidates, Richard Jose Martinez.

It was Blessing of the Backpacks a couple years back, I was new to St. Timothy's Church, new to St. Timothy's Preschool. I was set to bless the backpacks on the playground for all the Preschoolers there for a playdate before the school year started.

I was nervous because my own son was entering the school and I had never done the backpack blessing here before but... I had my stole, and the prayers ready, and the little backpack stickers to attach to the backpacks.

At the end of the playdate, we announced the Blessing and kids came up with their parents and their backpacks and I started doing it, still a little nervous.

Eventually, it was Richard's turn and I got ready to give the blessing and he flipped the script, he grabbed my stole and said

"I know what this is for. I know how to do that. Let me bless it."

There's photographic evidence of this, that I reposted on Facebook this morning.

This was my introduction to Richard Martinez, the first instance of him appearing from the crowd, plucked by God out of the masses to show the way.

### GOSPEL

There is also a child featured in our Gospel story, also plucked from the crowd, more on that in a moment.

First, though, I remember hearing our Gospel passage preached when I was a child and the preacher remarking on the line, verse 10:

*Now there was a great deal of grass in this place.<sup>1</sup>*

And the preacher, having grown up in the 1960s and 1970, said that there was some suggestion when he attended seminary that the crowd and disciples were under the influence of mind-altering drugs in the story, and that THAT's what the feeding miracle was all about.

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<sup>1</sup> John 6.10b

Other modern explanations have been that Jesus *shamed* the crowd into sharing the food that had been hidden behind their backs the whole time.

Our modern instinct, indeed, is to explain, to rationalize, to deconstruct somehow, this miracle. We cannot let it rest, and let it be... instead we think of all these ways to limit who God is and what God can do.

In that way, we aren't much better than the disciples.

Notice how Jesus first plucks one of his students, one of the 12, Phillip, and calls him up to the blackboard, and asks (rhetorically): "how are we going to feed all these folks?" Phillip has been there since the beginning, was there at the Wedding at Cana when Jesus turned water into wine, Phillip has seen Jesus heal the sick, and yet the first thing that he does is bring out his calculator and try to see how they can parse the meager amounts apparently available to feed the crowd.

Frustrated, Jesus says "okay, now, I am going to bring up one of my *star* students"—the *crème de la crème*, one of the Big Four, Andrew (Peter's brother).

But Andrew does not do much better, he says

we don't have the assets,

we don't have the money,

we don't have the volunteers,

we don't have the building,

we don't have the leverage,

the political clout,

we don't have the Holy Spirit.

He says all the things that you and I and the Church have said sometimes over the years: a theology of scarcity.

There is one more person in the story, though.

Andrew mentions that there is a young boy, a "lad",

who is **PLUCKED** out of the crowd.

That unnamed boy is chosen from those assembled,

like the boy in *The Polar Express* with the silver bell,

or the boy in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*,

chosen not because there is anything special about them,

but because every little boy and girl is special.

The boy simply says "I brought this food..." and then Jesus does what he does.

What happens next is the most important,

that little boy remembered what happened on that hot day with all the people and the green grass,

and he told it to the generations to come, how his little lunch box was able to feed the multitude.<sup>2</sup>

## **BAPTISM**

Today, we also have such a boy here, and such a girl, who are special simply because who they are in God's eyes.

Today we will pluck Richard (and Claire) from out of the crowd and welcome them into the Household of God.

Or rather, God has already brought them to their families and to us, and we get to be the Reception Committee who welcomes them.

We will pretend that we have much to teach them, but in reality it's the other way around.

As an example, I get periodic reports on what goes on in our Godly Play classroom downstairs and Pat once told me that Richard, to his credit, always raised his hand when questions were asked.

And his answer when called upon, regardless of the question, was always...

"Jesus"

and that's a pretty good answer.

*Sometimes children know something that we don't know.*

Another example of this is when Richard and his family joined the church, I was so happy because of their connection with the Preschool and because who they are.

I asked about baptism for Richard, and for Claire who was on the way at the time, and they said that they were interested in Baptism but they were thinking Panama, Clariza's home country, so their family could be there.

At some point, the situation changed and the family was going to be coming here. At some point in all of that, don't tell the Bishop this one, Richard started receiving communion. He would approach the Altar, kneel, and then with his arms uplifted and expectant, and he would receive communion through the bars.

Now remember that our architecture and courtroom architecture are similar, thus this is the BAR that separates the congregation and what happens here.

People can agree and disagree about whether that bar should be HIGH, or that bar should be LOW.

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<sup>2</sup> *Sermon Brainwave Podcast* Episode #975 "Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Ord. 17B) – July 28, 2024" (7/21/2024)  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/975-tenth-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-17b-july-28-2024>

But our canons are pretty clear, that only after being baptized should you receive above the bar.

Richard and I subverted that by him sticking his hands and arms through the communion rails in this way,

getting fed no matter what,

defying what we might think is possible

or permitted

or what we think we are capable of, given our scare resources.

*Sometimes children know something that we don't know.*

In this case that God has chosen Richard as a child of God

to be a member of this church

and he is ready to teach us a lesson

about what it means to want to eat the Bread,

the Bread of Life,

the Bread of Abundance.

## **CONCLUSION**

My apologies to Claire, who this morning has to hear all these stories about her brother. I just know Richard better. What I do know about Claire is that she loves my sermons so much that she lets us know sometimes how wonderful they are.

I worry that she might be in for a lifetime of hearing stories about her brother, but since Richard you can remember this day, your job is to remember for her.

To say this is what happened, this is who was where, that all your family from Panama and Spain and Fairfax came to this church, and the minister kept talking about me and how great I was.

How there was music and there was food afterwards and there was God's love surrounding you.

That's Richard's job to tell that story, and it's his parents' job, and it's his and Claire's godparents, and it's all of ours. To tell it in a way that shares God's love and message of abundance.

Our job is the same that boy in the Gospel, the lad with the lunch box.

TO remember our own baptism and the promises that we made,

and to share that story,

a story of God's abundance,

and a meal that went on and on

and a love that did the same.

**AMEN**