

**Sermon Notes – August 4, 2024**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. John 6: 24-35**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Pressing for a Sign. It's Here!”**

Five thousand people sat on the grass and ate their fill of bread. This backstory is essential for entering today's gospel, a feisty conversation in which Jesus reveals what this sign points to. But it does something more. This give-and-take is designed to awaken belief, to create discipleship. The climax occurs as Jesus announces that He is the bread of life. He has given them a taste of life that really is life.

A preaching direction declares, “We've been given what we are searching for.” We must pay attention to the first verses, in which the crowd gets into the boats to look for Jesus. They're seeking a sign in order to believe him. I can preach both the law and the gospel, and hold the mirror so hearers can see the tendency in all of us. In hard times, we often look for signs that aren't Jesus. Interesting! We seek signs that show what direction to take or hints that things will get better just up the road. Today's story illumines the path of abiding relationship: We've already been given what we're searching for. His name is “God with Us,” the light no darkness can overcome.

I can also pay attention to geography, which draws a poetically subversive picture; after feeding the crowds, Jesus and his disciples went to the other side of the sea. I may interpret this detail as a way to describe the reign of God. Following Jesus to the other side means breaking from systems where some get their fill of bread, while others do not. On the other side is an economy of sharing, where all have enough.

The aim of this fourth gospel of John is that we may believe and, in believing, have life in Jesus' name (John 20: 31). Believing brings an abiding relationship with the One who ushers in a world-changing reign of love and justice.

When we look at the Exodus text, we might ask, “What is the wilderness for?” Is it an accident of geography, or could wilderness have a deeper purpose? God rains down manna and covers the camp with quail to see whether the wanderers will follow God's teachings and, more importantly, know that He is their God (16: 4, 12).

The wilderness is for learning; learning to trust God, and learning God's ways of being community. The wilderness is also for unlearning; leaving behind oppression, and gaining imagination for His new creation. I should ask you to remember wilderness places in our lives and in society. Being careful to avoid everything happens for a reason;” and upon further thinking, I might ask, “What did we learn?”

I generally make it a practice to look for the big neon signs Paul provides for the “why” of a particular teaching. Jesus grants community members certain gifts; equipping the saints for ministry, so that the body of Christ can be built up, so that the community comes to maturity (Eph. 4: 11-13). We should not stop there. At this point, we could ask, “What's at stake here?” Why is it so important that Christian communities come to mature faith and understanding? Verse 14 provides the answer -- “so that we

aren't taken in by trickery and false teaching." Current events show how easy it is to lead people away from a message of love, justice, and grace, and toward a message that is against the teachings of Jesus and the commands of God.

The story of God's response to David's transgression in 2 Samuel 11 reminds us that God's heart is grieved when we lose our way. Verses 7 and 8 of this text list all that David's heavenly parent has done for him, and if that were not enough, He would have lavished more. Can you imagine God loving us in such a way that even in our messed-up lives, we are forgiven and made whole in Christ. You see ...It's God's Ultimate Plan!