

CRIBB<S> NOTES – July 26, 2009

“It is I; do not be afraid!” Jesus said to his disciples as they rowed their boat three or four miles out to sea in the middle of a storm. He called to his frightened disciples as they watched him walk on water (John 6:20). God’s power in Christ is an amazing display of grace and love. It cannot be dismissed because there are constant reminders of divine forces engaged in human history everyday. Yes, God is still speaking!

The familiar stories of Jesus feeding the five thousand people on the side of a mountain and later walking on water toward his disciples are recorded in the Synoptic Gospels with a remarkable exactness. As we read the narrative in John, we may ask ourselves what is its importance to us. Is it to demonstrate Jesus’ compassion? Is it to show us ways we can address people’s needs today?

The stories in John were written for the single purpose of explaining the power of God manifested in Jesus. The writer does not want readers to miss that very point. Nothing else rises to the level of clarity and significance. The only thing that matters is Jesus’ identity with God. Ultimately, a second question is asked: who will believe Jesus and dare to follow him?

The context of the account places the multitudes that searched for Jesus and were fed bread and fish amid Roman domination. Foreign soldiers are occupying Palestine and oppressing the people. It is a time when hopelessness and scarcity are rampant. Many have given up and others desire only to have a leader who will liberate them. Here enters Jesus.

His performance of great works, including feeding the hungry and healing the sick, signal a new era. Is he really the one? Perhaps, but not the one they had in mind. The sights of the people are too limited to see the greater purpose of Jesus being with them. They are overwhelmed by his ability to make things happen when there appears to be so few resources. A man known to his family and friends and throughout the region of his hometown is gifted with extraordinary powers. Surely, he must be the one who will lead the rebellion against the oppressors!

Jesus is with the people to liberate them from deeper troubles. He comes to elevate their souls and set their minds on freedom that breaks the slavery of sin, selfishness, and timidity. He points them in the direction of God who provides their needs and never withdraws divine love. But for many of the people that is not enough. They demand tangible results: food for the hungry, water for the thirsty, healing for the sick, rebellion against the occupiers. They want a king who will lead them to victory.

**What do we want? What do we expect? Money to get us past the recession?
Security to protect us from invasion?**

God’s power works through Jesus as a compass to put us on the right path. Jesus’ compassion for the vulnerable guides us to join those who struggle and suffer. God’s love is inseparable and unconditional. Jesus embodies divine love and instructs his followers “to love one another as I have loved you.”

God’s presence in Jesus remains with us. We are capable of doing incredibly good works to improve the quality of life for persons trapped in the mire of injustice. But doing good works alone is not enough. We must increase our spiritual appetite and submerge ourselves in the Word of God through prayer, meditation, and congregational conversation. Without a commitment to spiritual formation and development, the needs of the people will look overwhelming. We will wonder, “What can we do?” God’s abundant presence empowers us to do more than we imagine is possible. Ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary deeds when we are led by faith to do God’s work.

-Pastor Art Cribbs