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Gretchen Peterson

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## Sermon for Pentecost 9, July 25, 2021

Gretchen Peterson<sup>1</sup>

### John 6:1–21, NRSV

**G**ood morning, afternoon, or evening. Thank you for welcoming me into your time of worship today. My name is Deacon Gretchen Peterson and I'm speaking to you from my home in Saskatoon, on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis. Our Gospel story today is one with which we are all probably quite familiar. Whether we heard it first in Sunday School class or during another Sunday worship time, this story is quite a well-known story of Jesus's ministry.

It comes pretty early on in the Gospel of John, so I was curious about what had happened in the previous five chapters. John begins with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus—the Word of God, come in flesh form, to Earth. To be God here on Earth. To remind us of God's ever presence on Earth. There is no nativity in John, no birth story. We are taken right out onto the road, to walk with Jesus in his ministry amongst the people.

It's a fast-paced Gospel. We are splashed in the river Jordan as John baptizes Jesus. We journey along as Jesus calls his first disciples and then performs his first miracle at the Wedding in Cana. We witness Jesus's temper as he cleanses the Temple, ridding the House of God of the money changers. We sit at the table and at the well as Jesus visits with those who are considered inappropriate for him to associate with – Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus performs two more miracles – healing a royal official's son and healing a lame man near Bethsaida, the latter on the Sabbath. And we hear Jesus speak about the Son of God, come from God. We hear about the power and the life that this Son of God has. We hear about the promise of life for all creation.

A quick introduction, a few miracles tossed in, two visits with questionable people, the foretelling of who Jesus truly is, and the stage is set for chapter 6. I'm trying to imagine what Jesus felt like at this moment. He's shown his disciples, the broader community, and the Pharisees some glimpses of who he truly is, what he's all about, and why he's here. There's been some rocking of the Empire's boat. And it sounds like he needs a bit of a break, hence why Jesus tries to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But word has gotten out about Jesus. And a large crowd keeps following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Word has gotten out.

One of the things I love about Jesus is that he pays attention. We know he pays attention to his disciples, because he cares for them and is constantly trying to bring them up to speed on what the goal is for the ministry. We know he pays attention to the Pharisees, because he's got to watch his back and press against the rules and the authority while still trying to stay alive for as long as possible. But most importantly, we know Jesus pays

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<sup>1</sup> Deacon Gretchen Peterson is the Assistant to the National Bishop, ELCIC. This sermon was delivered in the ELCIC's Summer Sermon Series – 2021. Deacon Peterson prepared this sermon on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis.

attention to the littlest, the poorest, the outcast – because that is the true essence of who Jesus is.

Often the message of this Gospel story is to revel in the miracle of taking five loaves of bread and two fish and making them feed more than five thousand people. With leftovers. Sure, that's pretty cool. But perhaps there is another miracle. The miracle of paying attention to those around him and responding to their need. Perhaps the miracle isn't that Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and turned that into enough food to feed the thousands. Perhaps the miracle is that Jesus listened to the needs of the gathered. Their need to have food in order to participate in the Passover. Their need to be fed – not only with words – but also with sustenance.

Paying attention to this detail gives me more hope and more energy to continue participating in the ministry to which God has called all of us. We are all called to pay attention to those around us – the littlest, the poorest, the outcast. And to respond with abundance and overflowing love.

What does that look like for you in your life? Who are you called to pay attention to right now? What do you have that can be turned into an abundance of love and grace?

As I write this sermon, it is the beginning of July. The past few weeks have been tough. We are a country not only wrestling with COVID-19 but we are a country that is finally listening to what our Indigenous siblings have been saying for years and years. I have no idea what things will be like at the end of the month when you are listening to this sermon. But I know that the discovery of unmarked graves and children's bodies in the grounds of residential schools will not be something we are no longer speaking about. And I know that we will not be done the ongoing work of reconciliation, as that takes time and effort and we are called to be engaged in that journey for a long while yet.

Forest fires are raging across British Columbia and we've just had a week of record-breaking high temperatures in the western provinces. It feels uncomfortable and not just because we are so hot; it makes us worry about climate change and how we can make a difference in reversing the effects. It is a hard time to speak into, especially with a message of abundance. All around we see abundance – but an abundance of frightening, disturbing, worrisome news. It is hard not to feel overwhelmed by the news every day, which doesn't seem to provide much hope some days.

Over the past few weeks, I've heard many Indigenous folks offer this up in the midst of the recent discoveries: *First there is Truth, then there is Reconciliation*. We cannot move forward, in any area of our lives, without truth first.

How can this Gospel today point each of us to a truth in our lives? What can we take the time to truly pay attention to? What can we be motivated to engage in to spread the love of Jesus and the grace of God to those around us?

It might be the time to lean into something uncomfortable. It might be the time to learn something new. It might be the time to look around at the people gathered near us and listen to what they are saying, so that we can work together to feed thousands. And perhaps, out of that paying attention and attending to the needs of those around us, we might be like Jesus today. We may not be able to take five loaves of bread and two fish and create from it a feast for thousands. But we can each pay attention. We can look around us and truly see who is gathered, who needs us, who needs God's love.

When we do this, who knows what may happen? Our baskets might overflow! Jesus paid attention to the people. He paid attention to their needs. And he attended to them in an

overflowing way. Because that's the kind of God we worship and serve. May we be such followers of Christ, that the abundance overflows to all around us.

Amen.