

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 10th Sunday after Pentecost, August 2, 2015

The Entire Loaf

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

August 2, 2015

Matthew 6:5-15 John 6:24-35

The scripture passage from John this morning follows shortly after last Sunday's reading of the story about Jesus feeding the 5000.

After doing that Jesus and the disciples crossed the lake heading for Capernaum. When the crowd realized that Jesus had left, they followed him across the lake. Some went in boats and others undoubtedly walked around the lake for the distance really was not all that great. When they caught up with Jesus he said, *"I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."* They followed Jesus to get what they thought he could give them physically, not spiritually. They wanted the entire loaf, not their daily bread as asked for in the Lord's Prayer.

This sort of attitude is reflected by what is called "prosperity gospel," the idea that God will give you everything that you want, not just what you need.

God didn't promise you the entire loaf --- all the food you could possibly desire, an expensive house, a fat bank account, excellent health, a luxury car, and more. Quite the contrary.

Consider the wealthy young man who came to Jesus asking what he had to do to obtain eternal life. Christ told him to sell all of his possessions, to give the money to the poor, and *"follow me."*

In an article in the Charlotte Observer about 2-1/2 years ago, Lorraine Murray in commenting on this incident in scripture said that, *"Following [Jesus] means at times enduring suffering, but prosperity gospel folks sidestep that conclusion. They believe that if you are down and out, that's a sign of dwindling faith."*

People who follow and/or preach prosperity gospel credit everything they have to God. They expect God to reward them with houses, cars and whatever else they desire. They want the entire loaf and expect God to give it to them. I have news for them. It isn't going to happen.

Creflo A. Dollar, Jr. is a televangelist in the Atlanta area who espouses the

concept of prosperity gospel. He is incredibly wealthy but where does his wealth come from? It doesn't come from God. It comes from people he convinces to make large donations to his church under the mistaken belief that God will return to them many fold what they give. Prosperity gospel preachers like Creflo Dollar and Joel Osteen teach that financial blessing is the will of God and that by giving to their ministries, the givers will receive increased wealth. God doesn't work that way.

Prosperity gospel flies totally in the face of what Jesus told the rich young man and what scripture teaches in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Following Christ does not mean that one can expect an easy life and many material goods. There is no easy way to obtain the entire loaf. Following Christ means sharing what you have with those who are less fortunate than you are and not to expect anything in return. Think of Job who lost his health and wealth but remained faithful to God. Think of Jesus suffering on the cross. Think of martyrs like Stephen. The prosperity gospel folks ignore things like this.

Lorraine Murray said, *"Just think about all the poor people worldwide who struggle each day to find shelter, a decent meal and clean water. Shall we tell these desperate people --- whose children die from starvation and who live in broken down huts --- that their faith isn't strong enough? And God doesn't love them sufficiently to help them.*

"... It is spiritually dangerous to proclaim that people with money are God's chosen few.

"... Rich or poor, people who are faithful to God's commandments will indeed be blessed. The spiritual treasures [that they will receive] include grace and hope in times of trouble" not material treasures.

The people who followed Jesus across the lake were seeking the entire loaf. Jesus had fed them physically and they were seeking more. Jesus gave them more but not in the way they expected. He gave them grace. He gave them salvation. He didn't promise them full stomachs or great wealth as the prosperity gospel preachers do. He told them, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

God can't be expected to reward us with wealth and perfect health. It goes

against the grain of the Lord's Prayer you heard in our scripture reading from Matthew and which we will repeat in a few minutes, the prayer "*where we humbly ask for our daily bread --- not the entire loaf.*" (Lorraine Murray)

Shortly we will share bread and wine as we observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the meal which fills us spiritually, not physically, and that is as it should be.

Amen

Notes: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011. The article by Lorraine Murray appeared in the October 13, 2012 issue of the Charlotte Observer.