

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
July 26, 2015

(said through a megaphone) “Can I have your attention please.” “(ding, dong) doors closing” (siren noises) (yelling noises). What grabs your attention?

Our city is filled with non-stop bombardment of our senses. In fact research has suggested that the brains of urban and rural dwellers operate differently. They say that the regions of the brain that regulate emotion and anxiety become over active in city-dwellers. They think it’s the more demanding and stressful environment for us city-dwellers that contributes to the increased risk of anxiety and mood disorders in urban settings.¹ And it’s no wonder - almost everyone wants our attention. Neon signs try to funnel us into a restaurant or store, a car horn honks to grab our attention, the checkout clerk yells “next” to beckon our notice, and even the redesigned label on a box attempts to gain our purchase. We are constantly bombarded with techniques to grab our attention.

In our Gospel today we find Jesus grabbing the attention of those around him. At a surface level we can say, sure, Jesus is our attention by feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, and when he grabs our attention when walking on water like a water bug. At surface value these things are extraordinary attention grabbing measures. Yet, to really understand the depth and purpose of Jesus’ actions we need to look at it in context.

Right before Jesus performs these signs, Jesus has gotten into a bit of trouble with the religious authorities. In the beginning of John chapter 5 Jesus did a no-no. Jesus healed a man who was sick for 38 years on the Sabbath. After healing this man, then Jesus told him to pick up his mat and walk. Well, here’s the problem. Jewish law prohibits work on the Sabbath – healing is considered work and walking while carrying a mat is also work.

So Sabbath, you say, what’s that all about?

Well, first we see God resting in the story of creation. God creates, and then God rests. If you joined us last Sunday during Brew & Bible we recounted the story where Moses and the Israelites were in the dessert. They were hungry and were given manna, a food-like substance six days a week. To hammer home the importance of Sabbath, on the seventh day of the week no one could find manna because it was a day of rest.

So in today’s Gospel Jesus being a bad Jew. He’s working on the Sabbath and encouraging others to disobey the law - the law given by God and rearticulated to the

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2011/jun/22/city-living-affects-brain>

people through Moses. Jesus dissed Moses who was the most respected prophet, and did not adhere to God's commandment to observe the Sabbath.

In response to all this bad Jew Jesus tells the religious authorities that he is the Son of God. That anything that he does is the work of God. Jesus tells the authorities that they do not see that Jesus is the one written in the scriptures. That although these religious folks know the scriptures they do not believe what Moses wrote and they don't believe what Jesus says. They do not see the words manifest in real life.

With that background today's reading begins. There we see Jesus, crowds, and lack of food in a desert place. If you remember the whole manna story it went like this: all of the crowds of Israel were in a desert place without food. (That sounds familiar!) Then in the wilderness Moses spoke with God and they were given manna. Today we saw Jesus provide food for the people too. Today's reading is arguing that Jesus is the new Moses.

If there were a sparknotes or cliffsnotes sentence of John's telling of the feeding of the 5,000 it might go like this: Jesus knew actions speak louder than words. Jesus knew that the words he was saying to the religious authorities weren't enough, so he needed to prove that he was the new Moses – that he could provide to food for his people, that he was the Son of God.

And Jesus doesn't stop there; Jesus then goes and does something else that Moses did. If you remember that when the Israelites were fleeing from Egypt they got caught between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. And what happened? Moses lifted his staff and the Red Sea parted so they could cross the sea. So too Jesus crosses the sea. He walks on that water. Jesus proves yet again through actions that he is the new Moses. Jesus gets the Jews attention and our attention by putting words into action. He makes "visible words."

Each week we also gather here to make words visible. St. Augustine used the phrase "visible words" when he talked about the sacraments. In our sacraments of baptism and communion God makes "visible words."² Sure we can hear the God loves us, but it's different to feel the waters of baptism streaming over our face or sprinkled on us – these things are visible words that we are loved and held close. The water reminds us of the womb, of being so loved and cared for, and so close to God that we are in, among, and surrounded by God – like a child in a mother's womb.

And in communion we also see visible words, we see the scattered people gathered together at this special table. We stand next to someone from a different neighborhood, a different race, a different sexual orientation or gender identity, a different political background, a different age or ability, and we stand there as one. We are gathered together like those fragmented leftovers from feeding of the 5,000. We are gathered into an abundant gift to each other and the world. And then we stand together allowing the

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/07/pentecost-9-b-visible-words/>

particles of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, to be incorporated into our DNA. And each one of us literally becomes the body of Christ; we become visible words. We become the expression of God's love, grace, and peace.

That, my friends, is the power of this Gospel. We are reminded that our God makes visible words. In baptism, visible words. In communion, visible words. In your life, visible words. In our world, visible words.

So we gather here in this congregation knowing that we give our time and money to make words visible. When we support 6 AA meetings a week here, we partner with God to make words visible. When we journey together with people in baptism, marriage, and funerals, we find those visible words. When we send money to the larger church we know that the small amount we send is gathered together like the leftovers from Jesus' feeding today. We know it's gathered together to bring abundance – abundance that looks like over \$18.6 in 2012 that went to feed hungry folks in 56- countries. Through these things we know that God grabs our attention with visible words.

So my friends, all of that was said this day to remind you of God's attention grabbing visible words. Our God grabs our attention in many ways. Our God shows us never-ending love. Today we're reminded that our God is not simply a talker, but that our God grabs our attention through visible words. Thanks be to God. Amen.