

# biblestudy: november 2021

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury’s Adult Bible Study Series

## November 7, 2021 Text: John 6:1-15 “Shared Abundance”

Not wanting to acknowledge that miracles may simply be beyond our human understanding leads some people to become quite imaginative in explaining events like the feeding of the 5,000.

“What happened,” one might say, “is that everyone was so inspired by the generosity of this youth (John 6:9) that they began sharing the family picnic baskets they had brought.”

Another suggests, “When Jesus asked Philip how they could feed so many (John 6:5-6), the Lord already knew that there was a hidden supply stashed away out of sight.”

Or how about this one: “When Andrew pointed out that certainly if even this little kid had food (John 6:9), he assured Jesus that all the other folks would not come without packing a lunch.”

As I was typing this, my phone rang. It was a pastor friend who said that his nineteen year-old son had run into a man who had worked with his dad before his father went into the ministry. The man had said, “Your father saved my life. He showed me values by which to live and I never told him, but I changed how I lived and traded cheating for honesty, traded undercover sales for hard work, traded self-love for God-love.” My pastor friend never knew that until now.

Who knows what God can do with the five loaves and two fish that we have? Our very lives can become the means of grace by which God touches and re-arranges another life. That life blesses another life and that newly blessed life shows love to another and that freshly loved soul works for justice for the underprivileged and who knows—before long, 5,000 have been fed!

The question is not “How many talents or resources do I have”? The question is “What do I do with the small packet of bread and fish that I do have in my life?” If we have given it to Jesus, it is a miracle that so many can be fed! Such is the abundance of God’s grace.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Bishop William R. Cannon (*The Gospel of John*, Upper Room) has written: “Our weakness is strength in the hands of God. And Jesus makes our poverty rich. John is the only evangelist that tells us the bread was made of barley meal. That is how we know the boy was poor. Barley was fed to animals by the prosperous, but the poor used it to make their bread.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Here’s who I am, Lord...Use me...”

## November 14, 2021 Text: 1 Samuel 25:2-39 “A Meal of Reconciliation”

This week’s study text rolls like a TV mini-series. Nabal is a bad guy. David is a good guy. David helps Nabal’s workers. Nabal denies that David is worth the time of day. This so disturbs David that he decides to attack Nabal. Nabal’s wife, Abigail, intercedes and offers David and his supporters lots of good food. David is so impressed with her kindness that he backs off from his mission to harm Nabal. (If this were a TV program, at this point there would be a commercial break.) In a few days Nabal drops dead, so David marries Abigail. All of this in one thirty-minute program...uh, I mean, all of this in just one chapter of the Bible.

This lesson is back-to-back with last week’s study of Jesus’ feeding the five thousand. The power of shared food! Community is built. Reconciliation occurs. So, folks are nourished in more ways than one.

It does not take much leap of thought to connect this awareness to an urban soup kitchen for the homeless.

I talked recently with the pastor of a small rural church. Once a month they distribute food baskets from their church parking lot. One of those who came for food said to the pastor, “You think you are giving away food, but for me you gave the gift of faith.”

During the pandemic, the nightly news on TV often showed long lines

of cars as people came to get backpacks of food for school children.

This account of David and Abigail is a forerunner of the food pantry ministry and the free monthly breakfast and the annual church home-coming lunch spread and the gathering at the table of the Lord’s Supper. God takes the ordinary—bread, drink, meat, grain, and desert (1 Samuel 25:19) and works yet another miracle of healing and reconciliation.

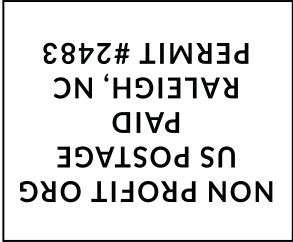
Come to think of it, God using the ordinary to give us grace. That begins to sound like good news!

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Bishop William Willimon has written (*Sunday Dinner*, Upper Room): “Few of us need to be told that a meal is a sign of hospitality and friendship. Any child knows that when you share your candy bar with the new kid on the block, it is an act which produces instant friendship.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Be present at our table, Lord; be here and everywhere adored...”



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November 21, 2021 Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 “Lord’s Supper as Communion”

Do you remember the first time you took Communion? My parents thought that you ought to have some understanding of what the Lord’s Supper was about before you partook. (I’m glad they did not insist that I know the value of vitamins before they would give me carrots and green beans!) Most Sundays, I sat with Miss Flossie Siler, an older woman who could keep an eye on my childish shuffles during the service. On this particular Sunday, my parents told me that I could come forward for Communion if I wanted to.

When the time came, I proudly stepped out of the pew and joined the adults who moved to the Communion rail. I watched others to make sure I did not eat the cube of bread too soon or spill the tiny cup of grape juice. And then it was time to return to my seat. No bells. No whistles. No flashing lights. No angel choirs.

But there was something different. I fully felt that I belonged. I now was as “important” as Mr. Shelton or Mrs. Braxton. Being at the Table gave me a welcome into the community.

The apostle Paul knew how significant that sense of belonging was. In this week’s study text, he writes about the damage done when that sense of “we’re in this together” was lost. In Corinth, the Communion meal was part of the larger “regular” supper. Those who had plenty of food ate without regard for those who came hungry (1 Corinthians 11:21, 33).

The power of community was broken, and in that breakage the oneness in Christ’s body was destroyed (1 Corinthians 11:27).

Paul reminds his readers that Jesus said that the bread and cup were his body and blood (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) and his followers were to come to that Communion Table to remember Him (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). To remember is to put the members back together again. The Holy Meal is the presence of Christ, the members put back together again. The Church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) and it is His body that is torn apart when community in the Church is torn apart (1 Corinthians 12:18). Does our community look like Christ?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Beacon Hill Press), Rob Staples has written: “When this metaphor (Church as the Body of Christ) is coupled with the correlative image of Christ as the Head of the Body (Colossians 1:18), a striking picture of the Church emerges. Each individual Christian is a part (‘member’) of Christ’s Body, living in harmony with the other parts, and under the control of the Head.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “In this Thanksgiving season, I give thanks for the community to which You have called me...”

November 28, 2021 Text: Isaiah 25:6-10a; 55:1-3 “God’s Banquet as the Celebration of God’s Reign”

Around here, you are usually a Blue Devil or a Tar Heel, depending on whether your athletic loyalties tilt toward Duke University or the University of North Carolina. Around here, you usually prefer vinegar based or tomato based barbecue, depending on whether your taste buds grew up in eastern or western North Carolina. Around here, on Sunday mornings you head for either the United Methodist church or the Baptist church, probably depending on how much water was used when you were baptized.

On a more serious level, around here you get built-in privilege if you are white instead of black. Around here, folks expect you to say “Y’all” instead of “Todas ustedes.” Around here, the streets may get violent if you think the political left is made up of traitors or whether you think the political right is dangerously ignorant. Around here, there is a cultural demand that you choose sides.

Then, there is Isaiah. Pushing back against all these ways we divide ourselves into “us” and “them,” the prophet looks ahead and sees God’s coming perfect kingdom. “On this mountain, the Lord of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples a rich feast...” (Isaiah 25:6) Look at the words that shape the focal text from Isaiah: “all peoples” (v. 7), “all nations” (v. 7), “every face” (v. 8), “the whole earth” (v. 8). The invitation to the banquet (v. 6) has no limitations.

This week is the first Sunday of Advent, a time when we look with anticipation. The prophet Isaiah invites us to look and see what God intends. In Isaiah 55:1, we are told that we can buy food even though we don’t have any money. That’s not a bad deal! The division between the “have’s” and the “have not’s” is gone.

And when we pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we sign up for working that we might now get glimpses of that “all inclusive” kingdom. What am I doing that signals that I already look to that coming kingdom? What am I doing that signals that it’s a kingdom of welcome? What am I doing to celebrate even now the tomorrow that God will give?

What Someone Else Has Said:

Néstor Míguez has written (*Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, Douglas Meeks, ed. Kingswood) “But in the city of God, we have doors open in every direction, doors that never close. The doors are guarded by angels, who are there not to exclude people, but to call the nations to come.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You have created us to be one people, but we confess we have broken that oneness...”

MAY I HAVE A PERSONAL WORD?

As I got ready to reflect on the focal text for December 5, 2021, I decided to pause for a moment of personal privilege. With the completion of last week’s commentary, I completed twenty years of this offering. (In case you’re counting, that’s 1045 weeks of Bible study.)

There was a three-way tie when I checked to see which author I had quoted most frequently in the “What Someone Else Has Said” portion: Will Willimon, Karl Barth, and John Wesley. (I’m glad Mr. Wesley made the cut.)

This started as a venture in the North Carolina Conference Christian Advocate. I am grateful that the Conference has continued to find ways to distribute my mumblings. In recent months, Cokesbury has made this series available online for users of the Adult Bible Study.

I try to stay ahead of deadlines, so I am writing this on the day after Ash Wednesday 2021. There is ice on the trees in my yard. There is bountiful uncertainty about the future of The United Methodist Church. But, the Word of God continues to speak to us, so join me as the journey continues!

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