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Do you see the theme here? The crowds are looking for the answer they are expecting, the box to check off or the pill to take so that they can be saved or be filled or whatever it is they think they are hungry for; but Jesus instead keeps pointing to God. The crowds come looking to Jesus because they are hungry. They are so hungry that they fail to see that the bread from heaven, given for the life of the world, has already been provided.

Maybe I'm just cynical, but I feel like so much of what the Church is and does centers around getting people to believe or do or say the right things; at least, that's the perception much of the world has. The ultimate goal of our faith has become about assuring that we will be among those who will be "raised up on the last day," that we will get into heaven when we die. When I read this story, though, it almost seems that, like the crowds, we become so preoccupied with checking off the boxes that we have failed to see that the thing we so desperately want has been in front of us the entire time.

In the story, Jesus only ever testifies to what he—and, by extension, God—is already doing. With that in mind, I begin to wonder: what if that ultimate resurrection (literal or otherwise) was the whole plan from the beginning? I don't mean that Jesus' action on the cross somehow made it possible, or he fixed what was broken in the Fall. I mean, what if resurrection is what God has been up to all along? What if Jesus didn't change anything, but simply pointed out what God was already doing? If all we mean by

salvation is life after death, what if that salvation has always been universal and inevitable from the very beginning?

I find the question interesting because I wonder how the Church might be different if, instead of trying to get people to do what we think God wants them to—to say or believe or do the “right things”—we actually just lived like God was already in control, already “saving” everything and everyone. What would that look like? If we really believed that nothing we did could stand in the way of what God had already chosen to do, would we do anything different?

I can’t help but notice that some people start complaining in this story. Those people are the Judeans, as St. John calls them. They’re the folks who believe that the only way to be right with God is to follow the laws and traditions of Moses. They believe that failing to keep every letter of the law will result in divine punishment. John says they start “complaining,” which is the same word the book of Exodus uses to describe what their ancestors did when Moses led them out of Egypt. What’s notable about this is that, in spite of their complaining and ingratitude, God still brought the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land—not because they deserved it, or had earned the right to be freed, but only that God had chosen to bring them safely to that destination. We’ve already seen Jesus draw the parallel between this story and that one; what if we’re meant to understand our lifespan on earth in the same way as the time in the wilderness when God was forming the people for what was inevitably coming next?

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When I read this text, I feel like Jesus is trying to get me—along with all these other doubters and seekers and hungerers—to wake up to what God is already doing, not to

convince or coerce or threaten or cajole me into behaving a certain way or worshiping in a certain building. He's inviting me to believe—not in a certain faith tradition or a particular religion, but in *him*. Faith isn't about creed, it's about discipleship. Frederick Buechner wrote, "If you want to know who you are apart from who you think you are, watch where your feet take you." Conversely, I really believe that where our feet take us helps form who we are, whether or not we realize it. I think Jesus is inviting us in this text to stop grumbling and arguing and defending what we think we already know, and simply to "come and see" what he's all about.

As people who know this story, we know that where Jesus is leading us takes us straight to the cross, to death; but not just any death. We think that the problem is that everybody dies; I think that Jesus sees our true problem is that not everybody lives. What Jesus does on the cross is not die, but *live*. He pours out his life, refuses to hold onto what was never his to begin with, and shows us in the most certain terms that in offering that life for the world, he never has to worry about running out of it. We see this constantly in little ways. When we give of ourselves to help one another, life flourishes. When we choose love over fear or hate or mistrust, life flourishes. It wells up like living water from a bottomless well; it rains down from heaven like manna in the wilderness. In this story, Jesus asks us to entrust our lives to that reality. What's the sign he gives to prove it? He is the sign: the living image of God already dwelling in each of us.

The crowds followed Jesus across the Sea of Galilee because they were hungry. They ate their fill of the loaves and wanted more. When Jesus told them about the food that endures for eternal life, they responded enthusiastically: "Sir, give us this bread always!" The crowd was hungry; hungry for a Bread King, hungry for a miracle worker, hungry for a spectacular God who could rain bread from heaven. What Jesus says to them is that all these things they think they are hungry for won't fill them up. "Here I am," he says, "You're looking at it."