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“brat, Waffle House, and Jesus Water-walking” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (07/28/2024, The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let us pray, Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts always be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Popular music has a reputation of being shallow. One only has to think of Buster Poindexter's hit, which has one lyric throughout the song, Tequila. However, there are some pop songs that are surprisingly deep. One song which many consider to be the most perfect pop song ever written is The Beatles' Help from 1965, in which John Lennon sings rather poignantly these lyrics, when I was younger, so much younger than today, I never needed anybody's help in any way, but now these days are gone, and I'm not so self-assured. Help. It's a song about insecurity and anxiety, and it went to the top of the charts in 1965. And then, of course, you have the album, which by many is considered the album of the summer, if not the year. It's the most critically acclaimed album of 2024, and it has like all things in our context become politicized, but this is not a political statement, but Charlie XCX has released this album, Brat. If you are of a certain age, you have no idea what I'm talking about. If you are another age, everybody you know is listening to this album on a loop. And she has a track called Sympathy is a knife on this album, and I was listening to it on my run recently, and I had to pause and go back. Did she just say what I think she said? Because theology made an appearance in this thing. People think that I bring these things up as some sort of, I'm attempt to pander to the young people. This is not true. I listen to this music because I actually like it, and because I find that God shows up in surprising places. Any artist worth his or her salt is asking the biggest questions. And Charlie talks about God in the song,

and it's a song also like John Lennon in 1965 about insecurity. She says she talks about going to a party and see, don't read it yet. Hold on, you're getting distracted. I saw your eyes. I saw your eyes. Have you ever, is there someone in your life that's doing better than you, or looks better than you, or is more successful than you? Maybe it's a sibling, maybe it's someone you work with. There's somebody though that taps into your insecurities. When you see them either in person or online, you feel worse about yourself. And that's what this song is about. And somebody gives her sympathy in that situation. George, your producer, and she says sympathy is a knife because it almost the fact that she needed sympathy, she knows that she shouldn't feel bad, that this person can't impact her, yet this other woman that she sees at a party brings up all her insecurities. And so even the act of having to receive sympathy is like a knife to her. But she says her experience of seeing this person that draws at her insecurities. She says wild voice tearing me apart. I'm so apprehensive now. She's talking about the voice in her head. You ever had that? Oh, I wish I had said something different. I wish I hadn't said that. I wish it'd done something different. I shouldn't have worn this. This is the worst thing. Someone else is wearing the same outfit as me, how embarrassing. Whatever those things are in your head, oh, I'm such a lame, whatever, nobody, people are talking about me. That's tearing her apart. She says I'm volatile at war with my dialogue. And here's the theology. I'd say that there was a god if they could stop this. She is out of control. Have you ever tried to control your emotions? I hate people who give these not people. I hate this thing that happens. When people offer trite motivational speaker pap like just take control or you can only control yourself. The only thing you control are your own emotions. I'm like have you tried? I burn the toast and I freak out. I can't control that. Have you ever tried to control your inner dialogue? That's what she says. If God could stop this, if someone could say that there was a god, she's so in touch with her powerlessness. A lot of people are desperate for help. I was over the last month visiting family in the Carolinas and I was outside of Charlotte and I stopped at the great Holy Temple known as Waffle House. I cannot say enough good things

about Waffle House. I'm not a paid endorser but man if you stop and you see one pull over. It ministered to me so much I can't even tell you the bowl of grits and bacon and eggs. I'm going to stop but it's I still get a warm feeling when I think about it. And I was sitting at the counter and making small talk as one does with the server. And I'm eating my grits and the next thing I know she is pouring out her life story. I was not wearing a collar. I was like I would check. I didn't tell her I was a pastor. You know sometimes I do that and then people start confessing their sins. I'm like I'm off the clock. I'm on vacation. 40 years old single mom can't take care of her kids so they're living with family. She made bad choices in her youth. She has no significant education or career experience and she has a car she bought eight months ago. The transmission just died. It cost 3,000 to fix. Her entire life savings \$500. People need help. People are desperate. Whether it's an internal struggle like Charlie XeX whether it's an external thing you've got going on like the server at the waffle house. I find that there are vast acres of need. In John 6 we see people in need. Over the course of this year we have been reading through the gospel of Mark and we will continue but we take a five week break now in the lecture area. The schedule we follow of scripture readings will be in John 6 for five weeks and it's all Jesus talking about bread and feeding people which we'll see we saw him do today and then he'll talk about bread and bread of life and there'll be a lot of a lot of a lot of bread. It's like Olive Garden for the next five weeks. If you they have unending breadsticks it anyways. This story begins with people in need. 5,000 people don't show up to hear an itinerant preacher unless they need some help. They take time off. They go out there into this grassy field. They hear this guy and it says why in verse 2 and this is how we know they're in people in need. A large crowd kept following them because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Now some of you have spent time in hospitals. Some of you work there. Some of you don't. Some of you can kind of maybe pretend that things are fine but there is a lot of need out there. Everybody I know needs healing whether it's internal, external, physical,

spiritual, emotional and so these 5,000 plus it says 5,000 men. There are women and children's huge crowd shows up because they see he's doing things to help the sick.

And they're hungry and Jesus asked the disciples how are we going to feed these folks?

I don't know if you've ever thrown a large party 40, 50, 150 people.

Can you imagine the catering

they would entail to feed 5,000 people plus? So Jesus says hey how are we going to get food for

these folks? And the disciples have nothing. They say we got a little money but not enough. This

would be an extravagant expense and we got this kid with some barley loaves and some fish.

We got their responses. We got nothing. People are in need. People need help. We got nothing.

That's the first situation we see of desperate folks. We see the disciples being desperate

later as they're rowing across the sea of Galilee. This is in northern Israel. It's not too far from

what you've been hearing about in the news. The past 24 hours, the rockets that came over from Lebanon

and the golden heights and all that. So and they're rowing across this sea, this inland lake.

And it says it became rough because a strong wind was blowing. So waves are getting turned up.

They're in a little boat. The boats maybe 25, 30 feet long. They've got these oars because

they're just trying to go against the wind if they could use the wind that'd be used in the

sails. But they're rowing. It says they've been rowing three or four miles. Now I was a

rower in college. The length of the race was 2000 meters. And I thought I was doing a lot.

Three or four miles against the wind at night in a storm. This is a verse that's fast to read but

when you think about it, I don't know if you've ever been engaged in extremely physical,

demanding labor for two hours. That's kind of where they are. And because Jesus isn't with them,

they can't ask him for help. Remember they wanted to make him king and Jesus slipped away because

Jesus isn't in political power. Hear me. So Jesus slipped away. He goes to pray up on the mountain.

So he's not with them. They are in the boat. And they are now at a place where they can't ask him

for help. There's nothing they can do. Even if Jesus were sort of with his Peter Parker spider

sense, get the sense that they're in trouble. He can't get to them because he doesn't have a boat.

He's just one person. Can you imagine one person rowing three or four miles across the stormy sea to get to them? It's hopeless. We have these two hopeless situations. 5,000 hungry people with basically nothing to feed them. And the disciples rowing in stock in the middle of a stormy lake. They could turn around, I guess. But they've sort of passed the point of no return.

And in these two hopeless situations, Jesus chose up with incredible power. The five loaves and two fish, feed thousands. So much so that they get as much as they wanted. And sometimes we think God is sort of stingy like his rationing grace. He can forgive some sins, but there's a limit. He'll help you in this situation, but don't get crazy. I don't know if you ever had unexpected guests for dinner and whoever's prepared the dinner is like, tells the kids like, don't take seconds. Like there may not be enough casserole for everybody. Here they get as much as they want it. They get as much as they want it.

It doesn't run out. You can just reach in there and grab it. You can be greedy because there's so much grace. And even more than that, they have 12 basket-folds left over. It's sort of an exclamation point highlighting and circling and redding for the disciples. Not only have I fed them, I can feed you. All 12 of you. You'd think they would get the lesson, but then they get in this hopeless situation. And they don't even call out for Jesus. They don't even pray. They just row, soaking wet hours and hours in the dark. And even though they haven't prayed or called for Jesus, he shows up walking on the water. And it says in verse 21, they wanted to take him into the boat and immediately, immediately, the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

So I want to talk about Elon Musk. Brother Elon tweeted something yesterday which displays what people normally think I find about God. This idea is not unique to him. It's actually very common in the church. This idea is that in the spiritual life, it's up to you. God plays a role. Maybe it's 50-50, but a lot of it is sort of up to you. And he tweeted, unless there is more bravery to stand up for what is fair and right, Christianity will perish. Now, I don't know, I really don't know what he's talking about. What is fair and right. I don't know what the issue is. I didn't so don't email me.

I'm only putting this up there to say and to kind of tease out what is

underlying, the assumptions
underlying what he's saying. He says, people need to do their part to
help God. Unless people stand
up for what's fair and right, Christianity will perish. And a lot of
people kind of reply to Elon,
oh, Elon. Jesus said that upon this rock, he will build this church
and the gates of hell will
not prevail against it. I'm with you forever to the end of the age.
It's not our job to save
Christianity. It's not our God to help God across the street like some
little old lady as Bono
sang. It is God who does the work. Not only for the whole church, but
for you. And for these
disciples who fed 5,000 with nothing, the disciples who got across the
lake after they were just in
a completely hopeless and desperate situation, they thought there was
no way for Jesus to get to
them. They thought it was all up to them. But it wasn't. We all tend
to think that we do our part
and God will do his, that Christianity is some sort of partnership or
cooperation. You hear this.
You may not hear it put it starkly as this, but whenever you hear a
religious person talk about
partnership with God or cooperation with God, what they mean is this.
You have to do your part
and God will do his. That is not what happens here. The disciples do
not partner with Jesus to get
him to walk across the lake. The disciples, when Jesus is how we feed
these people, they don't say,
we'll partner with you, God. They're like, we don't have enough money,
we only got five loaves,
we got nothing. Jesus send the people away. That's their partnership
is to bail. And Jesus has
watched this and he does it all. This is not partnership. This is not
cooperation. God does his
part. This is not good theology. Yeah, please clap. Yes, thank you. As
the Episcopalian canons
dictate, there is one applause allowed per calendar year in the
church. And so we've used it up,
but I think for good cause. For those listening to the podcast, I just
put a big X through Elon's
tweet. Rihanna gets her theology right. Rihanna, the erstwhile
superbowl performer,
fashion designer, producer, musician, and a spicy figure who I'm not
commending or using as some sort
of a role model. However, she sings, we found love in a hopeless
place. Not we cooperated with God,
but in a hopeless place, God found us. God does the work. And that's
really what I want to say,
that it's not this thing we do our part. God does his. It's God comes

to us. And this is what Jesus Christ is all about, the incarnate God coming to human beings. And I bet you either are in a hopeless situation or know someone who is. I bet you have a situation like the disciples in the middle of the lake with a boat and they can't do anything at its dark and they don't think God can hear them or see them or anything. And Jesus comes. I don't know what the solution will look like for you. I really, I don't. I know that I have been in hopeless places. And there are situations in my life right now that I can do nothing about. That I wish I could. But these stories give me great comfort because it shows how God acts. Not I do my part God does his, but God just shows up in spite of me to work. And this is what this meal is about. You may think if you came from a tradition that you didn't have communion all the time and you just started coming and saying, I was like, yeah, Lee, they take communion a lot. It's because we forget. We forget that God meets us in hopeless places. And what this meal is about, you know, forget this fancy silver cups and the paraments and the investments and all these sorts of things. What this meal about is that God comes to you. And he gives himself for you. And he wants to feed you so that you like the people who listen to Jesus and John 6 are satisfied. And they get, they get all that they need. That's what this meal is about. So this is a sign. This is a neon sign pointing to you that God is the one who will meet you in your hopeless place. I don't know when it'll happen. But I know this is how God works again and again and again. I've seen it in my life. I've seen the scriptures and it is the message of the gospel because the tomb is empty. That's really all I want to say. Jesus came. Jesus died. Jesus rose again. And he is for you. And this meal means that God works in the hopeless place. Let us pray. Dear God, we desperately and absolutely need your help. And you know exactly where and how even if we don't and we ask that you would help us and use this time of hearing your word and receiving this bread and wine, that it would be something that communicates that truth to us where we need it in our hearts in a powerful and real way. We ask this in Christ's name.