



The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, August 2nd, 2020

The Rev'd Deacon Richard Beaudoin

Sermon Transcript

Matthew 14:13-21

We Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Bring What You Have

We have all heard a lot of stories— novels, TV shows, movies, even commercials— that include a scene where unexpected guests drop in. Perhaps

you have experienced this in your own home, unexpected guests drop in to say hello and suddenly it is close to dinner time. You think, should I ask them for dinner? What can I feed them?

In the gospel story today.... Surprise! You are hosting a last-minute dinner party for 5,000 men, plus women and children.

If you take the entirety of the Gospels, there are only two miracles that appear in all four of them. One is the resurrection of Jesus and the other is the feeding of the five thousand.

Obviously, I do not need to stress the importance of the resurrection and why all four Gospels would proclaim it. But if the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is the only other one found in all four, it must be very significant.

More often than not, the story of this miracle is interpreted as a precursor to the Eucharist and the bounty to be found in the banquet of God.

And this is an important component, but I wonder if the substance of this story is more subtle than we might expect and the meaning more profound than we might have imagined.

This story captures the truth, the heart and soul of all the people involved, the all-important truth about Jesus, the all-important truth about the disciples, and the essential truth about God.

And one more important participant.

So, let's review....

It was springtime in Israel. The rains of March and April had come, and the brown hills had soaked up the spring rains and the flowers were blooming, and the hills were green again.

It was Passover time, their great religious feast, like Easter is for us. That meant a holiday from work. People were packing their donkeys and going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was a time of fasting and feasting.

Jesus was in demand. He had performed miracles; healed people and his popularity was becoming enormous. He was like a new rock star, and thousands would gather to hear him preach.

But it was also a time of tragedy. According to the gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist, the person to whom everyone looked for moral and religious inspiration, had just been beheaded by King Herod. Everyone was stunned by this tragedy, by this enormous loss, including Jesus, who had been baptized by John.

So, Jesus had intended to get away to a quiet and deserted place and have some time to himself.

He regularly found a private and restful place so that he could pray.

In this instance, the crowds follow him along the edge of the Sea of Galilee and a throng greets him when he lands his boat on the shore. It is an almost comical scene in a way – here Jesus takes a boat to get away from the crowds and as he closes in on the shore where he expects to be alone, there is a multitude of people, likely shouting his name and asking to be healed even before his boat reaches ground. It is a kind of first century paparazzi if you will; despite some considerable effort Jesus cannot find personal privacy even in this deserted place.

Did the disciples' step in and say, "Sorry, this is Jesus' day off..... go home, people"?

No, Jesus did as we would expect, he looked on the massive crowd with compassion, as people with a spiritual hunger, needing spiritual feeding. And so, he taught them, and he healed them.

Now it is getting late. Jesus realizes the people must be hungry, and they are too far from home to eat dinner later.

He asked one of the disciples, "Philip, where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" There were no food trucks, no McDonald's down the road. The disciples still don't get it. Even after witnessing so many miracles, they think "How can we possibly feed all these people?"

And you heard what happened next.

The gospels all mention that there were five loaves and two fishes. But John has an additional detail that I find very intriguing.

Only John tells about the source of the loaves and fishes.

Andrew becomes aware of a child with one little lunchbox, in the midst of 5,000 people. One child who opens his lunchbox and says “Hey! I have five loaves and two fishes, anyone want some?”

Andrew takes the child to Jesus. Jesus blesses the bread, gives thanks for what has been offered and suddenly the whole crowd is fed. So great is the abundance that it probably took the disciples hours to box up the leftovers: a goodie bag for each of them.

Jesus knew that there would be enough. He knows that there is enough today, enough wealth, enough care, enough love, enough food. The problem is getting the generosity started. And sometimes it takes a child to lead the generosity.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that “a little child shall lead them”. While Philip is busy looking at all the reasons the problem can’t be solved, a child is offering what he has and an adult both sees and hears him. And so, the crowd is fed, and the surprised disciples are packing up the boxes of leftovers. The innocence of a child who only understood that they needed food and he had some to offer.

And a little child shall lead them. Jesus once said – “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”.

We have got to enter the kingdom like a little child. With imaginations open to new possibilities. With curiosity and a concern for others. With the intensity of a four-year-old working on a puzzle.

When we make excuses, we sound like one of the grown-up disciples in this story. We sound like Philip, who looked around and saw only the problem and not the solution that was so close at hand.

The kingdom of heaven is like that – five loaves and two fishes get shared among a crowd of five thousand people – and suddenly, instead of scarcity, there is enough. But it starts with someone sharing.

Miracles happen and people are fed literally and spiritually.

Let me leave you with this image. Of a crowd of people gathered, and the adults fretting, when, out of the blue, a little boy offers up his loaves and fishes. And that launches a chain of miracles of generosity and abundance.

So, bring what you have. Give it with an open hand and a willing heart and see God's abundance. Jesus knew there was enough. The disciples discovered that there was more than enough.

There still is. Amen.