

## "From Small Beginnings"

Texts: 2 Samuel 11:1-15

Ephesians 3: 14-21 (Series B, 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 14

John 6:1-21

### Let us Pray –

O God, light of the minds that know you, life of the souls that love you, and strength of the thoughts that seek you - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breath your life into us that we may live in the manner you have appointed unto us and better love and serve you and one another. Amen

Today's Gospel presents us with the story of a miracle: - the story of Jesus, who when faced with a huge crowd of hungry people, over 5000 men, women, and children according to the other gospel accounts of this story, feeds them with five loaves and two fish.

In the story - despite the doubt from the disciples, this small beginning, the hungry are fed, and there are leftovers - indeed in the story involving Jesus there is an abundance of leftovers - there is more than when the feast first began.

The feeding of the great crowd, as John calls it, is the only miracle that Jesus did that is described in all four gospels. For this reason, if no other, we need to pay close attention to it. We need to ask ourselves - why is this so? What is it about this miracle - unlike all the other miracles performed by Jesus - that so catches the attention of the gospel writers? I think it has to do with at least *three separate things*:

*Firstly*, the story tells us that Jesus is used of God. John goes on after telling the story and speak of Jesus as the *bread of heaven* come down to earth - the one who is not only able to satisfy the *physical hunger* of his people - but their *spiritual hunger* as well. Jesus has, and is able to use, the power of God to feed the hungry. (*Bethlehem means the House of Bread*)

*Secondly*, the story shows us not only God's power at work in Jesus, but God really cares. God reaches out through Jesus to meet the needs of those who are following him - much as God reached out through Moses to meet the needs of the men, women, and children who had followed him into the wilderness.

*Thirdly*, the story shows us is that Jesus is able to take what is offered to him and to multiply it - so that where there is scarcity at first ends up being more than enough. It is this latter point that I want to focus on for the remainder of the sermon.

This miracle of feeding the great crowd of people, and perhaps sparked more conversation than any other miracle, people have tried to figure out how Jesus did it. Most people more readily accept the healing stories, they understand that the mind has a strong effect on health, that faith can in fact bring about healing.

But multiplying loaves and fish? this seems more incredible, more difficult, and so theories have arisen to explain how it was done. The most notable theory is that when the boy who had the loaves and fish shared them with others his example inspired others to bring out what they had brought with them and share as well.

I can't say how the loaves and the fish were multiplied nor do I want to try. But I do want to stress to you the fact that they did. I think that we really need to meditate on that fact. We really need to consider how too little becomes more than enough when it is offered to God.

In the four gospel stories about the feeding of the great crowd we hear something similar. Jesus is teaching on a hillside - there are over 5000 people there, and when evening approaches the disciples become concerned, they fear that the crowd will go hungry, and their solution is to ask Jesus to send the crowd away. But Jesus says to them - you feed them, and he asks Philip - who was from the region in which the story takes place, *"where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"*

Philip replies *"eight months wages would not buy enough bread to for each one to have a single bite"* Immediately afterwards Andrew, found a boy with 5 loaves and two fish among the crowd, he text others about his discovery - and then adds - *"But how far will they go among so many."* How far indeed.

The scene is set then for us and for our meditation upon it. There is a great need. And there are not enough resources to meet that need. It all sounds so familiar doesn't it? You can hear words like this just about anytime, especially when there are social or political problems that require an infusion of resources.

- How can we help with what little we have? We don't even know how we will we make do ourselves.
- How can we feed so many? How can we fund so many?
- We have so little and the need is so great.
- We don't have enough money to help out. We don't have what it takes.

And we can also hear the same tune about our emotional and spiritual resources when confronted with problems of caring for those who are lost and alone, those caught up in guilt and despair, in doubt and confusion. The chorus goes something like this, doesn't it?

- We don't have enough time.
- We don't have enough energy.
- We aren't smart enough.
- We aren't wise enough.
- We aren't professionals.
- There aren't enough of us to make a real difference.
- The same people doing every thing in this church.

But Jesus, didn't listen to this from his disciples, rather, like the old prophet Elijah, he took that which was offered to him in faith, blessed it, and handed it back to his disciples so that they might distribute it.

"They will eat and have some left over", so Jesus, after giving thanks to God, divided the five loaves and the two fish, and begins to feed the crowd. And there was enough to go around. And there were leftovers - so many that there was more than there was to start with. Which voice do we listen to in these stories?

The voices of the disciples who say, when told to feed the crowd - there is not enough - it is impossible. Or the voice of the one who tells us "*feed the people*" and who takes what we have to offer and makes it enough?

Mark, Matthew, and Luke all begin their account of the feeding of the crowd by saying when Jesus saw the crowd he had *compassion for them*, that he cared for them.

Jesus asks us to do the same - he asks us to care, to have *compassion*, and to go out into the world, and teach, and *heal*, and *feed* the people. This is a holistic ministry.

*We are called to be like Jesus* - - we are called to feed those in need, to feed them with both the bread of heaven and the bread worked by human hands. And we are not left alone in the doing this. God promised to be with us. All we need to do is to bring what we have as little as it is, as did the boy on the hillside to Jesus.

- To bring it with thanksgiving,
- To bring it with joy, and
- To bring it - not with regard to what it might or might not be able to do but with regard to the one to whom we present it, with regard to God and God's love.

The story of the loaves and the fish show us that Jesus is used by God, and it shows us too that God cares about us. It also shows us that what is *small* and *insignificant* in the face of this world can, when offered to God, be multiplied and provide for the world's need. Miracles all have beginnings, and almost always those beginnings are to be found within us.

Several years ago, I heard the story of a man named Paul. Paul had received a special pre-Christmas gift from his brother. It was a beautiful new car - fully loaded and ready to go. On Christmas Eve, when Paul came out of his office, a street kid was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. *"Is this your car, mister?"* the kid asked.

When he replied that it was, and that his brother had given it to him for Christmas, the boy said, "You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn't cost you anything? Free? For Nothing? Gosh, I wish..... *"I wish", the boy said, "I wish I could be a brother like that."*

- We can be a brother /a sister like that.
- All it takes is that we offer ourselves and what we have to God.
- All it takes is that we cease to worry about how little we have and begin instead to think about what it is that we can offer as little as it is.
- We will miss out on God's blessing when we have our hands tight.

We are in our 25th year of ministry together in St. Ansgar Lutheran. I believe we have done very well under the circumstances over the years as a congregation, I have witnessed one miracle after another as our needs for ministry is being met on daily bases.

Many broken folks that came through these doors of our found peace with God, healing and rest for their weary souls, love and grace. Despite ourselves, our doubts, and faithlessness ... God has blessed whatever we have offered Him as inadequate as it might be.

My friends, whether feeding the 5,000 on the mountainside or strolling along St. Catherine street, God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, *by the power of the work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine* (Ephesians 3:20) from the heavens to the universe, on land and at sea.

Let us be fed by faith, in strength or weakness, for spiritual and eternal satisfaction, for courage and comfort in the rough seas of life. When we step out together, no matter how fearful we are, we find courage and support with the knowledge and trust in the wealth of Christ's divine bounty in our hearts, our minds, and our souls.

God took something so small such as five loaves of (doubts) and two fish of (faithless) and turned it into some thing beautiful and marvelous, and sustain us all these years. God is good, God is really good.

I personally believe that, we do what is possible and let God do the impossible. What is in your hands?.....*Praise be to God who multiplies that which is given to him, day by day. Amen.*

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