

"You Feed Them"

Matthew 14:23-21

August 3, 2008

There is a great story about a High School football team that had two quarterbacks. The first team quarterback was gifted, aggressive, and a born leader. The second string quarterback was really athletic, but let us say, limited in that he lacked the mind for strategy. The championship game was in progress, the score was tied, the home team had the ball, and the clock was ticking down. An opposing player broke through the line of scrimmage and slammed the star quarterback to the ground with such force that he had to be carried off the field. Time was running out. The coach had no choice but to put in the back-up. The substitute trotted onto the field with a play called by the coach, huddled the team, and strode up to the line of scrimmage.

Surveying the opposing team, and much to everyone's surprise, he changed the play at the line. The ball was snapped, the quarterback handed it off to the half-back who busted up the middle and sped all the way into the end zone with the winning touchdown! An amazing play. Moments later, in the ecstatic dressing room, the coach grabbed his second-team quarterback by the shoulder pads and said, "Son, that was great! How did you know to call that play?" The boy said, "Uh, well coach, it weren't easy. I got up to the line and looked across at two of the biggest players I've ever seen and I seen their numbers. One of 'em was wearing a six and the other one was wearing a seven, so I just added them numbers together and got fourteen and called number fourteen." The coach hesitated a moment and said, "But son, six and seven make 13."

The boy, quite unmoved by the correction, said, "You know what coach? If I was as smart as you, we would have lost the game."

Things do not always add up the way they are supposed to, do they? Smarter folks might want to set us straight on some of the things that we believe - they might want to tell us that it just doesn't add up - you can not feed 5000 with a little bread and fish - you don't even have to consider adding in the possible number of women and children - it just doesn't add up. The disciples may have been largely simple fishermen without advanced degrees in mathematics but they had it figured out. But Jesus prepared the people for a meal anyway and everyone ate their fill with left overs to take home for later.

Dealing with the miracle stories of Jesus is always an interesting exercise. So often we see that the facts don't add up and we find ourselves trying to figure out how He did it. And in so doing, too often we just end up really missing the point - too often we end up diminishing the power of God as we impose our human logic to the equation. The point is the football team won the game. The point is the hungry multitude was feed. The point is Jesus has compassion for the human everyday needs that we experience and does something about our need.

One of the things that I have become increasing aware of as I have studied the scriptures over the years is that we are often side tracked by certain details of a Biblical story. It seems that it is very easy for us to simply pass over critical elements of the story when we think that we already have it all figured out.

The story is referred to as the feeding of the 5000. It is the story of a little boy who brought his lunch and Jesus miraculously feed everyone and still they had 12 baskets of leftovers. Perhaps we often miss the little conversation between Jesus and the disciples. "Send them away to fend for themselves in the nearby towns." That was the disciples suggestion - then knew how to add the numbers. Jesus' response, "No. You feed them!" He didn't say; "Hey, watch this!" He didn't say, "I'll take care of it." No! "You feed them!"

I imagined calling up our serving group leaders one day and saying and saying that we need to have a meal at the church. No big deal - Sloppy Jos, chips, bars, maybe some pickles - - - oh, by the way there will be 5000 - probably another 5 to 10 thousand with the women and children [most of the children will want two]. You feed them! Knowing how gracious our serving groups are, I suspect that they may swallow hard and then say that they can handle it. Personally, I'd say, 'You've got to be kidding! How many months do I have to organize this thing?'

"You give them something to eat!" There it is - right in the middle of the story of the feeding of the 5000. And Jesus simply takes what they have to offer - even if they thought it was of no significance – Jesus took what they had and blessed it. And the little feed the multitude.

"You feed them" There is a lot of hunger out there in our world. It hardly seems as though our meager 5 loaves and 2 fish are even worth mentioning - hardly worth bringing out. But Jesus has said, "You feed them!" And He will receive what we offer and bless it.

I read about a 3rd grade boy named Matthew LeSage who wanted to do something to help the hungry in his city. So he started a program a number

of years ago called, 'Hams for the Hungry'. In its fourth year, Hams for the Hungry raised \$40,000 to feed the hungry.

There was another young man, 13 years old at the time, who read about Dr. Albert Schweitzer's missionary work in Africa. He wanted to help. He had enough money to buy one bottle of aspirin. He wrote to the Air Force and asked if they could fly over Dr. Schweitzer's hospital and drop the bottle down to him. A radio station broadcast the story about this young fellow's concern for helping others. Others began to respond. Eventually, he was flown by the government to Schweitzer's hospital along with 4 1/2 tons of medical supplies worth \$400,000 freely given by thousands of people. This, of course, would be the equivalent of millions of dollars today. When Dr. Schweitzer heard the story, he said, "I never thought one child could do so much."

"You feed them!" It is not my intention of diminishing this beautiful miracle of Jesus in any way. I can not figure it out - it will never add up. Maybe that is as it is supposed to be. I don't need to know how Jesus is able to do the things He does. I need to believe and give thanks to God for His power and love. And I need to hear the call to respond to the needs of the many as my loving God taps me on the shoulder and says, 'You feed them'.

AMEN