

"You Feed Them"

Matthew 14:13-21

July 31, 2011

"Ho Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters". I love that opening in our first reading for today. I have always wondered a bit about that opening, "Ho!" - it seems like a weird little word to include in the text until I did some reading that said that it was a word intended to grab the listeners attention. I noted that in the newsletter and said that often times it is hard to get a persons attention. We are distracted by so many things in our lives Sometime you just have to use a "Ho!" or a "Hey You!" or a "Listen Up / Pay attention."

Ho ... Anyone hungry ... Thirsty? It seems like anytime you bring out the food, it gets the attention of people. {By the way - there is a breakfast being prepared for immediately after worship. So if you listen well and I talk fast we will get there well it is hot.} Jesus lifts up bread and fish. He blesses it and 5000 men [and I suspect that there were perhaps as many women and children also present] are all feed.

That will certainly get a persons attention. The stories of the miracles that were performed by Jesus always do that. All 4 Gospel accounts tell this story of the feeding of the 5000. It got the attention of the disciples and all who were gathered on that hillside And even though we have heard it so many times before we are still amazed by it. But now that the story has your attention, I wonder what it says to you?

God has power. Jesus does the miraculous. God provides. All true enough. But is that what this story says to us?

I read about a new pastor who was faced with this text of the feeding of the 5000 on the occasion of his first sermon. It was difficult. And what was worst was that he was so nervous that he made a few errors in what he was intending to say. At one point he said that Jesus feed the crowd with 5000 loaves of bread and 2000 fish. One bold member had noticed his nervousness and on hearing of the 5000 loaves and 2000 fish, shouted out, right in the midst of the sermon, "Well, what's so amazing about that? I could do that." Not knowing how to respond, the new pastor ignored the comment and quickly finished the sermon and quietly suffered his embarrassment. But the next Sunday he corrected what he had said, emphasizing that it was 5 loaves and two fish. Then looking at the man who had heckled him the Sunday before asked: "And could you do that?" To which the man replied: "I could if I could use the left overs from last Sunday."

It is a cute story And I can imagine some of you wanting to take up the challenge to heckle the pastor during the sermon. But the story gets to at least one of the points of the whole gospel text. We get a bit distracted by the miracle and too easily slide over the little

details - - namely, - did you hear it - "Ho there!" - Jesus said to His followers, "You feed them."

The disciples saw the need - people were hungry. They didn't think they could do anything about it - send the people away into town and let them feed themselves. But Jesus blessed meager resources and with that blessing the disciples proceeded to do exactly what they believed they could not do. It was a miracle. That was a miracle!

I decided to look up the word 'miracle' in the dictionary. The definition is really interesting. Webster's dictionary says that the word comes from a root word that means - to wonder at. The definitions recorded there were; 1.) an extraordinary event manifesting a supernatural work of God. & 2.) an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment. ----- I was surprised - I thought it would say something about an event that should not be possible but it happens anyway. But the definition of a miracle is not about the impossible happening - just about God acting - and when God acts, things are accomplished.

"You feed them," we are told. And we respond with a gasp. How can I do anything? I do not have the strength, the wisdom, the knowledge, the time, the ability I am so small - so unimportant. I simply can not do what God asks. But God acts - and that is always the thing to note first. God blesses the seemingly insignificant supplies from which we can draw. And when God blesses, the extraordinary happens.

God is constantly in the business of doing miracles. We marvel when 5000 are feed as though it is somehow unusual in terms of what God does. But in fact, God is doing it everyday.

I read an interesting article that said this: "If a dead man is raised to life, everyone springs up in astonishment. Yet everyday birth happens where there was no life at all - and no one is amazed by it. Yet it would seem plain to all, that it is a greater thing for life to be created where there was no life, then for life to be restored where there had already been life. ---- All marveled at the thought of water being turned into wine. Yet, every day the earth's moisture is drawn into the roots of the vine, grapes grow, are harvested and brought to the wine presses to become wine - and no one wonders at the miracle of it. ----- 5000 thousand and more were filled with 5 loaves and 2 fish - a wondrous miracle. Yet every day seeds that were sown multiply and grain becomes bread and feeds us all - and no one wonders."

So what is the miracle in today's Gospel text? Certainly it is a wondrous miracle that 5 loaves and 2 fish feed the multitude. But in Jesus, God is involved and nothing is impossible. Perhaps, as we look at the text, the miracle that we should see is that the bread and fish existed at all - an extraordinary act of God that brings seed to grow into a plant yielding grain - and grain being ground into flour to be mixed with other needed ingredients to make bread. And what an extremely outstanding thing that God should cause creatures to flourish in the sea that become another source of food. And maybe the miracle in the text is that one young boy - out of a whole crowd of 5000 + had brought a big lunch so that the power of God would be revealed to all of the people. And perhaps the real

miracle of the text is that, even with all that Jesus was dealing with after learning of the death of John the Baptist, He still had compassion for all of those people who came out to Him, healing the sick and feeding the hungry.

And so the disciples come to Jesus thinking that they need to send the crowd into town to line up at the counter of the local fast food joint. But Jesus says, "You feed them." That is certainly going to get our attention. When we do not know what to do - when we do not think we have anything to offer - when we just want to send folks away, our God comes to bless the meager gifts that we bring. And with God's blessing, amazing things happen.

Five loaves and two fish what is that among so many. I certainly understand the question. I ran across the following statistics this week. In 2005, the latest year for which data are available, 1.4 billion people in **developing countries** lived in extreme poverty—on less than \$1.25 a day. We live in the world's wealthiest nation. Yet 13 percent of people living in the United States live in poverty. 14.6 percent of households struggle to put food on the table. Nearly one out of ever four children live in those households. That's 16.7 million children.

Do we have gifts that we can place in the hand of Christ to be blessed and shared?

AMEN