

Sunday, July 7, 2019

Matthew 14:13-21

Five Loaves and Two Fish

It is great to be with you this morning to begin our Summer Series called "At Your Request". I've been doing this request series for a few years and I am always amazed at what people would like to hear a little bit more about and what the stories of the Bible learned many years ago still teach us today. The topics suggested this year vary from doctrinal teachings to stories of beloved Biblical people as well as the teachings and actions of Jesus. Today our focus on the miracle of feeding more than 5000 people with just 5 loaves of barley bread and two fish.

This particular story is found in all four gospels- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and each of the writers gives different information about this story. Our reading from Matthew begins "when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself." What had Jesus heard that made him want to get away by himself? If we read the passage above in Matthew 14 we read of the death of John the Baptist. Not only had Jesus been baptized by this man, he was also family. So Jesus withdrew and went to be by himself most likely to grieve and mourn.

Yet the crowds on shore saw him out in the boat on the lake and realized who it was. They were from small villages and according to Luke's version it was near Bethsaida when Jesus decided to go ashore. (Luke 9) The crowds saw him and followed Jesus on foot along the lakeshore. And when Jesus sees the crowd and how many people there are? He has compassion upon them. They were like sheep without a shepherd (according to Mark). John's reasoning as to why the people came was because of the healings that Jesus had done and this is what they wanted him to do- heal their sick. The people were in need of healing but as it turned out this was not the only physical need they had.

Jesus healed the sick and people were in awe of him. He also taught them many things that day. But as it was starting to get dark and they were in a deserted or remote place, the disciples wanting to look out for Jesus' best interests suggested to him that he dismiss the crowd to go home. The disciples knew it would cost a lot of money if they were to order in food and they did not have any food to share.

Jesus then asks them to find out if anyone has food. It is only in John's version of the story that we learn that the one who had food was a young boy who had 5 loaves of barley bread and 2 fish. We don't know how the disciples persuaded the young boy to give up his lunch but he did.

It is then that Jesus tells the disciples to organize the people on the grass. He had them sit down in groups of 50 or 100 according to both Mark and Luke. The people follow Jesus' plan and they sit patiently. It is then that Jesus takes the bread and fish, gives thanks, and has the disciples distribute all of the food both bread and fish. He then told the disciples to gather up what was left and when the disciples returned to Jesus each of them held one basket. Those present would have seen what occurred- 5 loaves, 2 fish and feeding over 5000 men plus women and children. Jesus had truly done something amazing- it was a miracle. Everyone had enough to eat and there were leftovers. What did the people think of Jesus now? Why did Jesus perform this miracle? And why was it so important that all four gospel writers include their version of the story?

We also know that Jesus did feed another 4000 men plus women and children on a different day. According to Matthew 15 this occurred a while later under similar circumstances. The people had been listening to him for 3 days and they were in a very remote area. Seven loaves of bread and a few small fish were offered. Jesus then took the food, gave thanks, broke the food up and gave the food to the disciples to distribute it amongst the crowd. After all had eaten, there were seven baskets full of leftovers. Jesus then dismissed the crowd and he left the area by boat.

But just listening to these stories of bread, food, and people being satisfied in their hunger, one might ask, what was Jesus trying to do and teach and tell the people?

The boy had offered all he had to Jesus. Had the boy joined the crowd as an interested bystander? Did he know Jesus at all? The boy offered his food not knowing what was going to occur- how did he not know that the people who were around Jesus were thieves? We do not know anything about the boy and how he ended up providing the food for the miracle to occur.

Why was he there and had he come with family or had he seen the crowd gathering as he made his way to school or back home? Why would he have 5 loaves of bread? This seemed excessive or maybe he was on his way to bring it to his grandparents or other family members. Was the boy playing hooky from school because he had heard that Jesus was nearby? His family might have talked about him before and how some of the people in his village had been healed by Jesus. Maybe Jesus' reputation had spread so far that even a small boy who would not have been privy to a lot of things would have heard this news that Jesus was in the area. But no matter what, the boy was in the crowd with his lunch- 5 loaves and 2 fish. He had been there much of the day and most likely all been in the basket and was

warm from the day's heat. But the disciples had come around and asked if anyone had any food to share, and this boy who is not named, said, "I have some," and offered it to Jesus.

Five loaves and two fish amongst 5000 or maybe 10000 or 150000 people (men, women and children) does not go far in the hands of ordinary people. We need look to the needs of outreach missions and even in your own household. How often do you need to purchase bread? But the boy offered up not just a portion of what was in his sack. But all of it. He didn't wine, and hold on to it. He would have seen Jesus and would have been amazed about what he could do. It's all he has, the boy told one of the disciples.

But what is to note for sure is what Jesus does with this ordinary bread and fish. Jesus takes the bread from the boy, he looks up to heaven, and gives thanks and then breaks the bread into smaller portions. He then gives this food in portioned pieces to the disciples. The disciples then take the food to the people who are sitting in groups of 50-100. Why had Jesus asked for the groups to sit in groups of 50 to 100? Easily, it was to do a headcount of how much he needed of the food and not have too much leftover over—only enough for his disciples.

But it is what Jesus does with the bread that we should notice—took the bread, looked up to heaven, gave thanks and then breaks it up for distribution. Was Jesus' action something new or was what he did necessary at all? Jesus did not want the disciples to dismiss the crowd. Did he know then what he was going to do to feed the people?

There are many insights in this story for us to learn more about Jesus our Saviour. The people sat and listened to his teachings for hours and eventually had physical needs to be met. Not only did Jesus heal the sick amongst them, he fed them all. He taught them what love was about and showed it by using the gift of a boy—a small portion of food which was minimal for all to be fed, yet in Jesus' hands this gift of food fed thousands.

One can only imagine what occurs when we give of ourselves to Jesus- not just a portion of what is in our basket or a portion of our life. What is possible if we give everything, our whole life to Jesus? We can only imagine. The boy did not hold back anything he had but freely gave it to Jesus not fully knowing what was going to happen. But Jesus did.

Can you imagine what the disciples thought as they searched through the crowd and asked if anyone had brought any food? This crowd of people had been patiently listening to Jesus and seeing people healed. But they could have easily turned on Jesus because of being "hungry" with hunger and

anger of Jesus droning on. Yet Jesus had not called them to gather together but they followed him as they were seeking to be healed, taught a new way to live their lives and be spiritually fed. Something was missing in their lives and Jesus was teaching it. The crowd walked far distances to hear him speak but to also see him heal people. Yes they were learning about Jesus but even more they were learning about their relationship with God- Father Son and Spirit and who Jesus was and is—the messiah. Jesus was a great teacher and he was the messiah but he had to show them that he was God’s Son as not everyone believed this or knew it. So by feeding the crowd and meeting their physical needs, he was also doing the work which God the Father sent him to do.

Jesus was also teaching them what it means to be a follower of the Messiah and a child of God. Jesus spoke about this when he stated, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” John 4:34 Jesus’ spiritual food wasn’t to sit passively and receive but to be active, roll up his sleeves, and finish the work God sent him to do. Being spiritually fed (according to Jesus, at least) isn’t about sitting and hearing but by getting up and doing.

So Jesus does this—he feeds their physical needs and then tends to their spiritual needs by showing them who he is. The people got up and followed Jesus wherever he went and then having heard him were physically fulfilled and were challenged to tell others about Jesus and what he did. Jesus told them to get up and start serving in meaningful ways so that they would continue to grow in faith and believe Jesus as the Promised One of God.

The five loaves and two fish—became food for the journey of all the 5000 men and women and children as their lives had been changed from what was before they sat and listened to Jesus and saw a miracle play out before their eyes. Jesus took the ordinary things of life- and made something special occur. And we are reminded of this each time we share communion in remembering Jesus. We take the bread, we give thanks and we break it and distribute it amongst the faithful who have gathered. Through the actual consumption of the bread we are nourished but more so we are nurtured and fed by God’s Spiritual presence. And this is what occurred for those 15000 people on the side of the hill. They experienced the bread of life in Jesus the messiah and they saw the sign that Jesus was God’s Son.

As Christians who know the story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we often take it for granted that the bread for our journey is not just in what we eat and drink together- but in what we learn together and do as a faithful family in Christ. How we reach out to others, give of ourselves and

worship God with thanksgiving and praise leads us to know we are living faithfully and being fed by God's love.

We just need to again believe in the miracles of God's love, to experience God's grace and to love others knowing that we are not alone. To offer ourselves freely to Christ's service means to let God work miracles through you and to you. But for this to occur you need to believe and have faith in the One who made you and the one who died and rose for our sakes. The Spirit of God calls us to tell this story of a miracle so that others may believe in Jesus as the Son of God. How do you respond to this miracle? What are you offering to Christ in order that others will know you belong to him and that you have faith strong enough to ask for miracles?

LET US PRAY

Holy God of grace and love we praise you for this miracle story of small gifts offered up for big purposes. We praise you for Jesus who gave thanks and blessed the food so offered and that all were fed. We pray O God that we too may offer our gifts, our lives our prayers and our thoughts so that big purposes may result and may people will come to know you. Hear our prayers O God. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.