

“More Than a Picnic”

Matthew 14:13-21

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Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 10, 2013

Do you have what it takes to do great things for God? Most of us would probably say there's not much we can do to really effect change and so we settle for doing little or nothing about the problems of our society. We say, I don't have enough time or money or special talent or whatever. Today's reading really is all about what God can do with just a little. He is, after all, the one who can literally make something out of nothing.

This story of Jesus feeding the five thousand is very familiar to most Christians. It's one of the earliest stories about Jesus taught in Sunday School and it's a popular passage for preachers. It's also one of only two miracles found in all four gospels. The other is the resurrection of Jesus. Because this story is so familiar to us sometimes we my hurry past it, thinking we know the story and what it means. But when we do that, when we just skim over the story because it's so familiar, we miss its importance and more importantly we miss what God wants us to hear.

It seems to me that there are two ways we can miss the message. One way is to read this miracle of Jesus multiplying the bread and fish and simply reject it. This is the view of scientific naturalism that says nothing happens outside of the material world and so it's observable. People who hold this philosophical view of the world reject anything supernatural but as we learned last week that results in rejecting Jesus, which is a dangerous thing to do.

The other way we miss the message God has for us in this story is to see it as simply one more miracle story, just an historical account of something Jesus did. But there is a message here that affects each one of us. R.C. Sproul wrote, “Clearly, the Holy Spirit regarded this event as something of great

importance for the saints who would live in generations to come.”

This is the beginning of a new focus in Matthew. Jesus is now focusing his attention on teaching his disciples. While the crowd is part of the story, the dialogue is only between Jesus and his disciples. The story begins when Jesus hears about the death of John the Baptist and wants to go away to grieve. He and his disciples get in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee to a remote place. The Sea of Galilee is really a lake and not a particularly large one. It's fourteen miles long and only seven miles wide and it sits in a bowl with hills all around. The people on the shore could easily see where the boat was heading and so they went on foot and met Jesus as he got out of the boat.

Matthew says that Jesus saw the large crowd and had compassion on them. He spent the whole day teaching and healing. Late in the day the disciples see a problem developing. The people aren't leaving and they apparently didn't bring any food. So the disciples go to let Jesus know about the problem. Of course problems need solutions and so they offer their solution – send the people away. In their mind Jesus has done enough and it's time to call it a day.

Jesus, however, offers a different solution to the problem. He says, “They don't need to go away. *You* give them something to eat.” The disciples' problem just got much bigger. In fact, it just became impossible. They realize this and in verse 17 they say so. “They said to Jesus, ‘We have only five loaves here and two fish.’” The gospels of Mark and John have the disciples respond that eight months of wages wouldn't buy enough bread for everyone to have some. The five loaves and two fish are really nothing for this large crowd. The fish weren't exactly 28” redfish. They were more like dried sardines. And

John tells us that the bread was barley loaves. They were probably more like small rolls than loaves. This is what poor people and animals ate. Jesus, of course, knows what he's going to do but he wants his disciples to realize that they could not solve the problem. Only Jesus could do it.

So Why is this passage so important for our faith? What are the lessons for us today? I think there are three. First, we see that Jesus had compassion on the people. Even though the people had spoiled his plan to go somewhere quite, he loved the people and was moved to teach and heal them. I think it's safe to say that many people in that crowd, perhaps most of the people, did not really understand who Jesus was. They were not all believers. But Jesus taught them, healed them, and fed them anyway. He didn't deny anyone because of a lack of faith.

The same is true for you. Wherever you are in your faith journey, Jesus loves you and he's concerned about you. That's not just some trite cliché that would sound good on a bumper sticker. It's serious. The God who created the entire universe is concerned about you personally, both your spiritual needs *and* your physical needs. Sometimes in life our resources seem inadequate for providing for ourselves, much less accomplishing something great for God. But Jesus is willing and able to meet those needs. That's the principle behind tithing. When you tithe you are making it a priority to trust God to provide.

That brings us to the second lesson. Jesus really is *able* to provide. The Gospel, the good news, the very heart of the Christian faith rests on the fact that this man named Jesus, who lived two thousand years ago in the Middle East, really is the God who made everything in our world out of nothing. If He can do that He can certainly meet your needs. Notice that Matthew says, "they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over."

Not only did Jesus meet their needs, He provided more than they needed. When Christ begins to work in our lives we often find that he provides more than we could ask.

The third lesson for us is that God works through people to accomplish His work. Jesus told his disciples to feed the crowd. They brought to him their meager offering of bread and fish. Jesus then gave it back to them to distribute to the crowd and it was more than enough. The Church is the Body of Christ. We are His hands and feet in our community. He calls us to do our part in accomplishing His work.

The problem is when we begin to think that we have too little to offer in order to make a difference. The truth is that it *is* too little. Until we let Christ use it. I want to share with you one example of that kind of thinking. Many of you know David Martin, a freshman at Flour Bluff High School. He wanted to make a difference in the lives of people in our city and so he began volunteering at Mission 911. What he discovered last year was that Mission 911 was unable to house some men because some of the beds didn't have mattresses and others were in terrible condition.

He could have thought, "what can a teenage kid possibly do to make any kind of impact on poverty?" Instead, last year David decided to try to raise money to buy a few new mattresses. What did he have to offer? He likes to ride a unicycle so he asked people to sponsor him for a dollar or two per mile. He planned to ride 10 miles. In the face of poverty that's like a few pieces of bread and fish. But he offered it to Jesus who blessed it and gave it back. It turns out that Mattress Firm, a mattress store here in town, heard about David's plan and they offered to sponsor him for one mattress per mile. By the day of the event they had increased it to provide all new mattresses for Mission 911. Yesterday David did it again except that this time he rode 20 miles and is raising money to

purchase equipment and supplies for the dental clinic at Mission 911. David Martin takes what little he has and brings it to Jesus who multiplies it.

Today is our annual Mission Fair. Many of our ministry partners are here with exhibits over in Kleberg Hall. I am proud of our Missions committee for putting this together. After the service you have the opportunity to visit with the different ministries and see the ways that our church is involved in making a difference here in Corpus Christi but also in other places in the US and around the world. You also can find out how you can personally get involved, even if it's something small. One of the things I love about our Mission Fair is that the different ministries get to learn about each other and while they're here they often find ways to work together, effectively multiplying their effectiveness. That's Jesus at work.

Let me conclude by pointing out one more thing about this passage. Verse 19 says, "Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass." The Greek word translated as "sit down" actually means "recline." That's important because people reclined at banquets. Far from leaving hungry, the people are to prepare themselves for a feast. Matthew is comparing this banquet with the one right before it at Herod's birthday party. One is worldly, the other is heavenly. One leads to the death of John the Baptist which foreshadows the death of Jesus. The other foreshadows the heavenly banquet, the Lord's Supper. Comparing the two, Jesus' banquet is much better. The good news for us is that we get to help serve and see the miracle.

Amen