

August 3, 2008

12th Sunday After Pentecost
Matthew 14:13-21

“Five Loaves and Two Fish is More Than Enough”

One of the things we do in our congregational life is gather to eat together and to serve others. Groups of us prepare food for funeral teas, our Community Meal, and other church and community events. Usually we have a fairly good idea of how much food to prepare but occasionally more people show up than we are expecting. More often than not, even when we have more people than we are prepared for, everyone gets enough to eat, and sometimes there is even food left over.

Expecting to feed 60 and ending up with 100 is one thing, but what about our gospel story today! We are told that 5000 men plus women and children, a crowd of 20,000, has gathered to be with Jesus.

It has been a wonderful day for the crowds who have left their villages to be where Jesus is. People have been blessed by Jesus’ love and compassion for them. Lives have been healed, people’s deepest emotional and spiritual needs have been touched.

But now evening has come.

The disciples recognize that it will soon be time for people to eat.

They approach Jesus with a reasonable suggestion – send the people home to their villages where they can eat in their own homes.

It has been a great day but all good things must come to an end.

Jesus doesn’t tell the disciples what they want to hear.

He says to the disciples – “you give them something to eat.”

The disciples check their supplies and let Jesus know how little food is available – 5 loaves and 2 fish is all they can come up with.

You think feeding 100 people when you’ve prepared for 60 is bad news!

How about feeding 20,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish!??

A few quick phone calls and a dash to the corner store isn’t going to help the disciples!

This is every host and hostess’ nightmare!

20,000 hungry mouths and 5 loaves and 2 fish!

Jesus has a plan.

Everyone is invited to sit down on the grass. He takes the 5 loaves and 2 fish, gives thanks, blesses them, raises them up to God, and gives them to the disciples to distribute to the people.

And you know what happened! Everyone ate and there were 12 baskets of left overs!

This is the only miracle story that appears in all 4 gospels.

The gospel writers recognized the power of this story.

The story is good news for us at Runnymede.

Here we are gathered with our 5 loaves and 2 fish, seemingly not much to offer. We are surrounded by needs – hurting people, lonely people, sick people, dying people, hungry people, people dealing with addictions, painful family situations, people dealing with unemployment or underemployment, people hungry for spiritual and emotional peace, people searching for meaning and purpose.

How can our measly 5 loaves and 2 fish, the collected time, talents and dollars of our church family, make any difference here or anywhere else? Limited resources, unlimited needs.

And there's the world beyond Runnymede. A world where a man is savagely killed by a stranger on a bus. A world where more than one billion people live on less than one dollar a day.

A world where every six seconds a child dies of hunger.

A world where as a result of famine, war, and natural disasters there are currently close to 50 million refugees and displaced people.

Our 5 loaves and 2 fish won't go very far in this needy and hungry world.

Our gospel story will not let us wallow in our seeming lack of resources in the face of incredible need.

5 loaves and 2 fish, gathered, and given to Jesus, blessed by our compassionate Saviour and offered to the crowds will be more than enough.

In Jesus' hands our seeming scarcity turns into abundance.

There is more than enough to feed everyone with baskets left over.

This is the gospel!!

The story is told of “when Albert Schweitzer was doing missionary work in Africa and needed medical supplies. A young boy heard of this need and 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 responded as well.

Eventually, he was flown by the government to Schweitzer’s hospital along with 4 and a half tons of medical supplies worth \$400,000 dollars, freely given by thousands of people.

When Dr. Schweitzer heard the story he said, “I never thought one child could do so much.”

These stories of people making a difference for good continue to happen.

The story of 5 loaves and 2 fish blessed by Jesus challenges us to continue to offer our resources in the service of the Saviour.

Let us challenge the voices within that say “nothing can be done”.

Let us resist the temptation to dismiss those who are in need.

Let us not give in to those who would have us believe that the goal is life is to accumulate things for ourselves.

As someone has said – “I’ve found that love is a renewable resource.

The more you give it away, the more you get. In giving you receive.”

Will Willimon observes: “I think we come into this world with a sense of scarcity. I’ve got to grab, hoard, accumulate, pile up, and guard.

‘It’s mine and you can’t have it’ the little child learns so quickly to say.

I’m told that one reason why my dog gobbles down his food so quickly is that for the first few million years, when dogs lived in the wild, food was a rarity. When a kill was made, all the dogs gathered around the carcass and wolfed down the meat. It was important to eat fast lest another dog get the food. So millions of years later my dog is still gobbling down the food, even though he’s the only one there and has all the time in the world to eat.”

Remember back in 2002 when Pope John Paul the II came to Downsvew. 800,000 people gathered including 200,000 youth from around the world. In the midst of harsh weather, heavy rain, a muddy field, people were fed spiritually.

I was moved by these words by the Pope: "Although I have lived through much darkness, under harsh totalitarian regimes, I have seen enough evidence to be unshakably convinced that no difficulty, no fear, is so great, that it can completely suffocate the hope that springs eternal in the hearts of the young. Do not let that hope die.

Stake your lives on it.

We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of God's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son."

Christ can take our 5 loaves and 2 fish and use it to bring hope and love to others.

Our story begins with 5000 men and many more children and women gathered around Jesus.

It's time for supper.

There is great need and limited resources, scarcity.

"We have nothing here but 5 loaves and 2 fish."

But the story moves from scarcity to abundance.

"And all ate and were filled and there were 12 baskets of food leftover!"

What God can do is amazing!!

Jesus says to each of us – bring what you have to me, even if it seems small and insignificant, and I will use it to make a difference in the world.

This is good news!

Thanks be to God!