

Sermon for Sunday, 28 July 2024

St. Luke/San Lucas

2 Samuel 11:1-15; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

For the Word of God in scripture,

For the Word of God among us,

For the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God.

Amen.¹

Many of us have heard the story of the feeding of the five thousand, the five loaves and two fishes, a story of God's miraculous power to provide. As a child, I thought of Jesus, standing in front of the crowd with a basket of food, waiving his arms, and then the basket becomes a never-ending source of food, refilling itself over and over and over again. And I've heard messages and sermons on this, as an example of an abundance gospel, that whatever our need, God will provide.

But in looking at the passage again for today, I thought perhaps Jesus had something else in mind. God is the God of abundance. God does provide. But

¹ <https://lakewooducc.org/2021/03/03/sunday-service-2-28-2021>

perhaps there's a bit more that Jesus wants to teach his disciples—and us. Let's take a closer look.

The crowds had been following Jesus around, witnessing his power of healing, listening to his teachings that the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, was at hand. For a population suffering under the Roman occupation, looking for a Messiah, a rescuer, Jesus must have seemed like their last, best hope. They were looking for a leader, someone powerful to stand up to the Romans, to throw off the chains of the oppressors, to restore the grandeur of an independent Israel. So here is another opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate his power, to show the world what he could do.

However, that did not correspond to what Jesus had been teaching. The kingdom of God is as someone would scatter seed on the ground, that grows he knows not how, ripens and harvests.² The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, which when planted grows up large enough for birds to nest in.³ The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with flour until all

² Mark 4:26-29

³ Mark 4:30-32

was leavened.⁴ In each of these parables, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is likened to when humans do something—plant, sow, mix—and God then provides more.

Jesus once again tests his disciples, to see if they understood his teachings, to see if they had gotten the message about the kingdom of God. Usually, it's Peter who gets to mess up the response, but this time, it was Philip.

Jesus asks him, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip responded, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Two hundred denarii, the amount a common laborer would earn for working two hundred days. Lots of money. More than any of the disciples would have in pocket change. More than all of them put together would have.

That seems like a reasonable response. But remember, this was a test. And, as usual, the disciple missed the message. Jesus wasn't asking about money—he had just spent days teaching that his authority was from God, not from humans, that

⁴ Matthew 13:33

the kingdom of God did not depend on earthly powers, but on the actions each of us take.

Yet still, when faced with a challenge, Philip's mind went immediately to the mundane, to earthly power, to money. Because that's how we address problems, right, we use money. We write a cheque. We pull out the credit card. We buy a solution. We pay for what we need. Or we look to the rich and powerful to do it for us.

But that's not what Jesus had been teaching, and he used this as a teaching moment. A child, a boy, had been listening to Jesus' teachings. He had been absorbing the messages, messages of the kingdom of God. And so, when he saw that there were a lot of hungry people, he offered up his lunch. Five small loaves of bread. Two fishes. What he had, he gave.

The disciples began passing around the baskets. Some believe that the baskets magically refilled themselves. Others think that the crowd, having heard Jesus' message, and perhaps feeling a bit ashamed that a young boy had offered up all he had, began contributing, putting in what they had, sharing with each other.

And not only was there enough food for everyone there, in the end, there were twelve baskets left over—one for each of the disciples.

Here is a point I think Jesus was making—it's not earthly power, money, that creates the kingdom of God, that provides for our needs. Rather, it is the community of faith, working together, trusting God's abundant grace, that will bring the kingdom of God into being.

I've shared this story with some of you before. The church I attended as a child had a practice of periodically putting a large box, usually an appliance box donated by the local Montgomery Wards store, in the Narthex. For a couple of weeks, an announcement would be in the bulletin. Sometimes it would say, Family with teens need food, or Family with toddlers need formula and Gerbers. After a bit, the box would disappear, only for another one to show up a few months later.

One Sunday, as we were getting ready to get in the pickup for church, my dad asked my mom, aren't you forgetting something? Mom looked at us—two kids, Bibles, dimes for the offering. No, she said, we're good. Dad said, what about food for the box. Then, the whispering began. My dad was working as a day laborer,

after he—and about a quarter of the town—had been laid off from the mill. My mom was cleaning houses, babysitting, anything to bring in a bit more money. We weren't well off, but we were getting by. My mom said, This really isn't the time to give. And my dad said, if we have food in the kitchen, then we have enough to share.

At that, my mom went into the kitchen. We could hear the cabinet open and close—not quietly. And mom returned with the smallest can of corn Niblett's, the little single serving cans that are used for salads and such. Without saying a word, my dad went into the kitchen. Once again, we could hear the cabinets opening and closing. Then my dad returned, with the largest, family-sized can of pork-and-beans in his hand. We got into the truck in the chilling silence, and went to church.

There, my mom defiantly put her can of corn in the box. My dad, quietly, added his can of pork-and-beans. And then we went into Sunday School, church and coffee hour. Several hours later, when we went out to the parking lot to go home, we discovered that the back of our pickup was filled with food. The collection box was for us.

Teresa of Avila is credited with saying, “Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.”⁵

Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes—but only because a young boy was willing to share his lunch. God fed a family of four with a small can of corn and a family-sized pork-and-beans—but only because the community was willing to share of their food.

We do live in a world of God’s abundance. God can provide for our needs. The kingdom of heaven can appear here on earth. If we let go of our focus on earthly power, if we stop holding on to money as safety, if we are ready to be the hands and feet and eye and heart of God here on earth.

⁵ <https://kellyjohnson.typepad.com/seekinghim/2010/06>

And God does not ask for more than we have, just to share what we do have. With that, we can feed the hungry. We can clothe the poor. We can find shelter for the homeless. We can bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

The youth in our Gospel offered up his lunch—and thousands were fed with twelve baskets left over. My parents offered up a small can of corn and a large can of pork-and-beans—and a family of four was fed for a month. Just imagine what God can do if we offer up what we have!

Amen.