

All Saints Anglican Church
Springfield, Missouri
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In this morning's Gospel reading we have the story of the Miracle of the Feeding of the 5,000 – a story that is included in all four Gospels. In the account of Jairus's daughter that we heard 2 weeks ago, Jesus demonstrated that God has authority over sickness and death. In the healing of the woman who had been bleeding and the awakening from death of the daughter of Jairus, Jesus demonstrates God's compassion, God's grace and authority. In this morning's reading we see God's grace and providence - God can create so very much out of so very little. We see his abundant provision for His people in Christ.

Jesus had sent out his disciples, had commissioned them to go out through Galilee and preach that people should repent because the Kingdom of God was near – “they drove out many demons, and healed the sick – anointing them with oil” – (Mk 6 v. 7-11).

The disciples returned to Jesus and reported all they had done and taught – they greatly desired to share their experiences with their Lord - Jesus wants to get them away from the crowds that gathered around His disciples because they had not even eaten and needed rest– they went to the other side of the lake – the northeast corner – for refuge but the crowds figured out where they were heading and beat them there, moving across land. When the boat landed Jesus saw them all and was moved and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.

This huge crowd of people was mostly men, though some women and children presumably, who were likely on the way to Jerusalem for the Passover – 5,000 is the number of men.

It got to be late –

It was a remote place –

The disciples grew concerned for the people –

Jesus suggests that they give the people something to eat –

The disciples say in response – 8 months of wages (200 denarius) would not buy enough food for such a crowd. “Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” (In John's telling this is asked by Phillip) All that can be found in the way of food is 5 small barley loaves and two small fish - (in John, Andrew brings to Jesus a boy who has these items).

In the natural, this is a very dire situation – seemingly hopeless. The cost of

buying provisions for this assembly would be so enormous that it would be virtually impossible.

But Jesus calmly instructs the Disciples to have the people sit down on the plentiful grass and to arrange themselves in groups of 50- (this reminds me of the picture of lying down in green pastures in Ps 123- and isn't it the task of a shepherd to lead his flock to a nourishing food supply?) "Taking the five loaves and 2 fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied and the disciples picked up 12 baskets full of broken pieces of bread and fish." It is a miracle, which could not be counterfeited, and a full proof of the divinity of Christ.

The crowds of people sought the spiritual food of Christ's word – ardently – they wanted to know more about Jesus – they wanted to listen to him –they “ran ahead” to be in at the place he was going - had seen the “signs” of His miraculous healings and they just had to experience more of Jesus.

Question: On your way to church this morning, did you see people running to church to meet Jesus? – Did anyone grab us by the arm and say “come with me I know where Jesus is – you don't want to spend another day without knowing him!”

These people were spiritually hungry—they were spiritually running on empty – do you think modern Americans are hungry in this same way? How many are too filled up inside to ever want to eagerly run towards the boat Jesus is in as it approaches the shore? They are already filled up - Filled up either with themselves or deceptive spiritual foods that are only preparing them the way to eternal death? I was one who was filled with such rotten food for a time.

Jesus and His disciples were hungry and weary themselves and in need of rest– but that they put that aside – Jesus has compassion on this huge crowd because they needed a shepherd badly and ministered to them. I guess this is a lesson for all who serve as ministers of Gospel—(Gal 6:9 – “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

While Jesus ministered spiritual food to the people he also took care that they should not want for physical food.

Such an amazing picture – this mass of people, seated beneath Jesus on this hill and He breaks the 5 small loaves – and the people are fed. The disciples have the joyful task of bringing the blessed food, to the hungry people. This scene brings to mind the manna in the wilderness that God provided to his people Israel as they wandered in the desert, led by Moses. A substance that was supernaturally provided by God to sustain and nourish His people bread from heaven – the food of the Lord's mercy.

The feeding of the 5,000 pre-figures the Last Supper – the sacrament of bread and cup of wine of the New Covenant. The body and blood of Christ given for us – the holy food and drink of unending life in Him. Christ is the bread of life.

In him there is enough for all that come. None are sent empty away from Christ- but those who come to him full of themselves. Christ is the provision for our hunger –hunger is a lack of food – of the right kind of food– we are starving and wasting away – we are famished spiritually – it is only Christ who is able to supply what we lack, what we desperately need. . .

It is only Christ, the bread of life, who can feed us the food of salvation – He is God in receivable form – in the Garden of Eden were two trees: The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – Adam “chose poorly” – he ate of the fruit of the second tree – it looked so very appealing – it must have looked so much more desirable than the Christ-fruit of the Tree of Life.

Back to the idea of manna, In OT Numbers, Chap 11 -A rabble within the Israelite community grumbled about the manna that the Lord provided “ and began to crave other food” (the manna tasted like wafers made with honey and coriander) – this rabble (non-Israelites who had followed the Israelites out of Egypt) included who had incited other Israelites to complain about their diet “ If only we had meat to eat! WE remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite – we never see anything but this manna!”

The manna was too bland – it didn’t suit their appetites. Is Christ the Bread of Life not to your taste also? Do you have an appetite for the Bread of Heaven or is something else more to your liking? Some kind of neo-pagan fusion cuisine that even some mainline Christian churches are serving up nowadays?

The wisdom of God is foolishness to those who are perishing – the Bread of Heaven is likewise not an appealing taste to those whose palettes are already satiated or whose appetites crave something else. The Lord’s anger burned against the grumblers in the Israelite camp and in His wrath He sent a huge flock of quail as meat for those who complained against the manna – there was quail on the ground of the camp “ to about 3 feet high above the ground The people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than 10 homers (about 60 bushels) but while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the Lord burned against the people and he struck them with a severe plague. There fore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.” (Kibroth Hattaavah means “graves of craving”).

Those who spurned God’s provision in this scene from Numbers perished. The Bread of Life that is Jesus Christ is God’s provision for his people – through His Holy Spirit God draws those whom He chooses – he gives each a spiritual hunger that only Christ can satisfy. Hunger is a kind of pain - a great an awful pain – that makes us aware of how needy we are- that cannot within ourselves supply what we need – that we are dependent on some force outside of ourselves to fulfill us – CS Lewis points out that pain shatters the illusion we have that all is well “ Everyone has noticed how hard it is to turn our thought to God when everything is going well with us. We have all we want is a terrible saying when “all” does not include God...As St. Augustine says somewhere, “ God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full – there’s nowhere for Him to put it”

The Bread of Christ is free and available to all who turn to Him today – Phillip may have got it right when he noted the enormous expense it would take to feed the 5,000 – because even though the Bread of Heaven is free it was and is the costliest gift ever – it cost The Father the death of His precious son upon the cross who died for us as our substitute--- This is bounty not to be wasted or thrown away – the fragments were picked up by the disciples and they filled 12 baskets.

Lets not us waste any of what God has given us in Christ Jesus – lets provide him joyfully to a hungry world – for those whom we know who have not yet accepted and received Christ in their lives, let us pray that God will create in them a Godly craving for the only food that brings true life – “ The bread of God who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” – Jesus Christ.