

9th Sunday After Pentecost (A) 8/2/20 youtube link:

TEXT: Matthew 14:13-21

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Years ago...there was a terrible EARTHQUAKE in Alaska
which devastated the city of Anchorage.

Many people WROTE to the GOVERNOR of Alaska,
demanding that he do certain things.

Generally they outlined the SUFFERING they had ENDURED
...and they wanted the STATE to take RESPONSIBILITY.

After the initial surge of activity,
...the governor appeared on television to REPORT to the state.

The governor talked about LETTERS he had received.

Among the letters...the governor reported he had received a 3 x 5 CARD
from a small BOY.

It had 2 NICKELS taped to it with a MESSAGE:

"Use this wherever it is needed.

If you need more, let me know."

How COOL is THAT!

How CARING!

What a NEAT KID! 😊

Of course...his 2 nickels wouldn't GO very far...amidst such NEED.

But it was a powerful GESTURE

from a sincere HEART and ATTITUDE!

Well...in today's GOSPEL...we hear about **ANOTHER**
cool...caring...and neat KID!

We are VERY familiar with the STORY.

This FEEDING miracle...the feeding of the 5,000...
is the ONLY miracle which is found in ALL 4 Gospels!

The story BEGINS

...NOT with the MEAL...NOT with the large CROWD...
--but with Jesus "*seeking a deserted place by himself.*"

John the Baptist had just been KILLED.

And Jesus was trying to "*get away from it all*" for a little while
--to grieve...to heal...and to spend some "*quiet time*" with God.

But the CROWD was RELENTLESS...and FOLLOWED him...
...and got very HUNGRY!

And a small BOY who had 5 loaves of bread and 2 small fish
--SHARED his LUNCH with JESUS
--and helped JESUS...pull off a MIRACLE!

(pause)

Rev JEFF WEDGE gives us some very interesting historical INSIGHTS.

1.) *The Deserted Place*

The place where Jesus went was most likely not a desert,
...but an uninhabited area considered a wilderness.

It was land typically used for pasture when there was grass available,
and largely abandoned the remainder of the year.

2.) *The 5 Loaves and 2 Fishes*

These were the two elements of the basic diet for the POOR in Galilee.

A normal day's ration was 3 barley loaves
...and was approximately enough for 2 people for a day.

The fish would have been either pickled or smoked,
..and were considered a delicacy when eaten with the bread.

This is a clear suggestion
that the followers of Jesus were generally poor.

At the least, it would seem that much of the crowd following after Jesus
was composed of the lowest...poorest strata of society.

3.) *Jesus BLESSED the meal*

This term may be taken to mean either
-- "*thanked God for the loaves and fish*" ...or
-- "*asked God's blessing on the loaves and fish*".

Within Jewish tradition,
the FIRST meaning is what the head of a family did before a meal.

The SECOND meaning
is more of a modern imposition on the tradition.

Hence...the FIRST understanding
is almost certainly what was intended here
-- "*Jesus THANKED God for the loaves and fish*".

4.) *Jesus BROKE the bread*

a.] **Proper etiquette** required the father (**head of the household**)
to break the bread to indicate the meal had begun.

Throughout the feeding story,
Jesus acted as the HEAD of a Jewish FAMILY...
--both in his desire to provide for the crowds
--and in his preparation and manner of distribution of the meal.

This ritual was very FAMILIAR
--to those who made up the crowd
--and those who initially heard the story.

The abnormally large number of individuals...over 5,000!...
were incorporated into a familiar FAMILY RITUAL.

**b.] Later in LUKE and also in ACTS...“*breaking the bread*”
held EUCHARISTIC ...Holy Communion significance!**

Actually...in all 4 gospels
there is Eucharistic significance to this miracle!

5.) *Jesus GAVE the bread and fish*

This act ALSO is loaded with Eucharistic significance.

Some early Eucharists included both bread and fish
--either in ADDITION to the wine...or WITHOUT the use of wine.

But either way...in the early church...
--the LEADER broke the bread
--then the DEACONS distributed the broken pieces
to the congregation.

6.) *After eating...the people were FILLED*

The text here indicates a sense of being *GORGED!*

7.) *Many BROKEN PIECES were left over*

Not merely the SCRAPS of leftover bread remained
--but the whole PIECES which were broken!

In other words... not only did everyone eat ALL they could HOLD
--but there were FULL portions remaining
at the conclusion of the feeding!

The immense amount of food involved here
bring out the Eucharistic themes of the story as well.

The Eucharist is a table from which
NO one EVER has to depart unfilled or unsatisfied!

And there are typically leftovers after OUR Holy Communion services!

8.) *Jesus fed five thousand men besides women and children*

The EXACT number of people is impossible to determine

--but at least 5,000 men were involved.

Attempts to determine EXACTLY how MANY people were there

--are mostly guesswork

--and add little to the understanding of the event.

We KNOW there were a BUNCH of folks there

...and JESUS fed 'em ALL!

(pause)

HOPEFULLY you found this little HISTORY lesson

to be HELPFUL in gaining a DEEPER understanding of the story. 😊

But WAIT...there's MORE!

(pause)

I.) This story SHOWS that Jesus really CARES about people!

Rev. RICHARD GRIBBLE says:

"Traveling about Judea and Galilee

*Jesus most assuredly must have become weary
from the hectic pace of his public ministry.*

He was constantly besieged by crowds...asked questions...

...accused of wrongdoing

or failure to uphold the Law by Jewish authorities.

Possibly disappointed with people

who could not or refused to understand his message,

...or perhaps simply out of weariness,

--Jesus withdrew to a deserted place.

He sought to get away at least for a respite,

so he could renew his spirit.

But the people tracked him down and came to him.”

And Gribble ASKS:

“What was the Lord's response?

Did he say, ‘Go away! Leave me alone!’ ? ☹️

No!

Jesus did not turn them away!

He came to the crowds with compassion and pity and cured their sick.

Jesus never turned away those in need!” ☺️

(pause)

Jesus was **FILLED** with **COMPASSION** and **CARE**.

He cared **MORE** about the **PEOPLE’s** needs
...than about his **OWN!**

He cared **MORE** about the **PEOPLE’s** needs for **FOOD and HEALTH**
...than about his **OWN** needs for **REST and RENEWAL!**

Can you **IMAGINE** the **DIFFICULTIES** involved...
in just getting over 5,000 people to **SIT** for a **MEAL?**

That’s hard **ENOUGH** to do with a family of 5...let alone 5,000!

And on **TOP** of that...figuring out **HOW** to **FEED** ‘em all?

I’M not a **COOK**.

You won’t **EVER** find me **WORKING** in a **RESTAURANT!**

That’s **NOT** my “**THING**”! ☺️

I’m not **BAD** with a **BBQ grill**...pretty **GOOD**...actually.

But I’m **NOT** a **COOK!**

So... I can EASILY imagine
how HARD this MIGHT have been for JESUS
--ESPECIALLY as TIRED and WORN OUT as he was!

But Jesus cared MORE about the **PEOPLE's** needs
...than about his **OWN!**

He cared MORE about the PEOPLE's needs for **FOOD and HEALTH**
...than about his OWN needs for **REST and RENEWAL!**

And SO...he took CARE of 'em...ALL of 'em!

This story SHOWS that Jesus really CARED about people
...and he **STILL** does!

He's NEVER too TIRED or WORN OUT ...
...or too BUSY or DISTRACTED...
--to CARE about us!
--and to TAKE care OF us!

(pause)

II.) The people were HUNGRY...and Jesus said: "YOU feed them!"

Jesus told the DISCIPLES to feed the crowd.

And THIS is IMPORTANT!

Don't ya think Jesus could have DONE it ...ALL by HIMSELF?

He was GOD...ya know!

...part of the TRINITY as we understand it!
Don't ya think HE could have just SAID the words...
--and PIZZAS would have APPEARED!
--a THOUSAND pizzas!
--enough Pizzas to feed EVERYBODY!
--with maybe some BEER on the side?



SURE he could have!
ABSOLUTELY!

He could EASILY have pulled off that FEEDING miracle
...ALL by HIMSELF!

**But it was more IMPORTANT
for the DISCIPLES to SHARE in the MIRACLE!**

TONY CAMPOLO is a professor of sociology and a popular speaker.

He was once invited to a women's conference
where he was to give a major address.

These women were being challenged
to raise several thousand dollars for a mission project goal.

While Campolo was sitting on the dais...the chairperson turned to him
and asked him if he would pray for God's blessing
as they considered their individual responses to the goal.

Campolo stood.

And to the utter amazement of everyone present
...he graciously said "No."

He approached the microphone and said,
*"You already have all the resources
necessary to complete this mission project
right here within this room.
It would be inappropriate to ask for God's blessing,
when in fact God has already blessed you
with the abundance and the means to achieve this goal.*

The necessary gifts are in your hands.

*As soon as we take the offering and underwrite this mission project,
we will thank God for freeing us
to be the generous, responsible and accountable stewards
that we're called to be as Christian disciples."*

And they did.

Wow!

Leave it to Tony Campolo...to hit the nail right on the head!

Jesus said, "*YOU feed them!*"

But...you know WHAT?

It was GOOD for the DISCIPLES
to SHARE in the FEEDING!

It was POWERFUL for the DISCIPLES
to PLAY a PART in the MIRACLE!

Through DOING so
...they GREW in their FAITH!
...they grew CLOSER to JESUS!
...and they GREW in the UNDERSTANDING of their MINISTRY!

They would NEVER have BECOME the "*12 men who changed the world*"
--if they HADN'T taken PART in this "feeding"
...and in the many OTHER "feedings" that were to COME!

(pause)

And the SAME is TRUE for US!

Jesus STILL says:

*"Bring to me
...your hearts and your resources!
...your talents and your ideas!
Let's see what we can do with them...TOGETHER!"*

He COULD do it all on his OWN...TRUE.

**But it's STILL more IMPORTANT
for US to SHARE in the MIRACLE!**

And AS we SERVE our LORD...and CARE for his PEOPLE...

--WE grow in OUR faith!

--WE grew CLOSER to JESUS!

--and WE grow in the UNDERSTANDING of OUR ministry!

(pause)

**III.) Now NOTE...TONY CAMPOLO did NOT say
that we are to CARE for people and FEED them
--without Jesus!**

No way!

Not HARDLY!

Jesus' DISCIPLES did not "*feed people*" ENTIRELY on their OWN.

Neither do WE "*feed people*" ENTIRELY on OUR own.

This gospel is NOT just a STORY
about SHARING what WE have.

It is about how JESUS takes a MEAGER supply
and TRANSFORMS it into ABUNDANCE!

WE are FED by Jesus ...VERY well...

--even when it DOES not LOOK like the resources are available!

And Jesus uses US to feed OTHER people...VERY well...

--even when it DOES not LOOK like the resources are available!

(pause)

And THIS is TRUE...EVEN during a PANDEMIC!

COVID-19 is BAD...REALLY bad!
But it does NOT limit JESUS!

IN and WITH the POWER of GOD
Jesus TOOK a LITTLE...and TURNED it into a LOT!

He still CAN!
And he still DOES!
EVEN during this dreadful PANDEMIC!
(pause)

Henry Ford once wrote:

*"A generation ago there were a thousand men to every opportunity,
while today there are a thousand opportunities to every man."*

- * Is this still an accurate perception? (I think so!)
- * Do we still see ministry opportunities everywhere?
- * How is Jesus doing this with our CHURCH?
(He IS... check out the STORIES in the August newsletter!)
- * How and where does God give us OPPORTUNITIES?
- * In this DIFFICULT and CHALLENGING time...
the opportunities are DIFFERENT!
- * How does Jesus HELP us make the MOST of them?

(PAUSE)

Well...in CLOSING...I HAVE to say:
--there's ONE thing about this morning's LESSON
that sorta ticks me off!

We're talking about "*Feeding the 5,000*"
...on THIS... the 1st Sunday of the month!
...when at ML we traditionally have a Sunday Brunch!
...and we're the best restaurant on the island!

But due to that nasty Covid Critter
...we can't DO that TODAY!!

We can't have a fellowship meal at FAITH church yet...EITHER!

Grrrrrrr! ☹️

Bummer!!

(pause)

However ... Jesus DID feed us on Thursday a week ago!

Many of us from both Martin Luther and Faith
--met in ML's parking lot
for a brief Holy Communion service.

That was AWESOME!!

And we'll DO it AGAIN

--daytime

--and evening to accommodate folks who work during the daytime.

What's MORE...Jesus is STILL feeding us EVERY day!

Even though we are PHYSICALLY DISTANCING
from family...friends...work...God...and maybe even ourselves...

--Jesus is STILL feeding us in MANY different ways

...both physically and spiritually!

And he STILL wants to use US
to HELP him feed OTHERS!

(pause)

So...how about we all LOOK ...REALLY look...
for the OPPORTUNITES that God's giving us
this WEEK!

We may or may not have 2 NICKELS taped to a card
--like that little BOY in our opening story.

But CAN we TAKE what we HAVE to God and say:
*"Use this wherever it is needed.
If you need more, let me know." ?*

Be on the LOOKOUT!

‘Cause GOD and JESUS...really ARE at WORK here!

T.B.T.G.

AMEN!!