

August 2, 2020
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Barnes - *"Food for Thought"*

We open again with this prayer from Psalm 19:14 -

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

They sat down, more than 5,000 in all. This event - The feeding of the five thousand (more with women and children!) is recorded in all four gospels - Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17. And this one in John 6:1-14. Only in John does Jesus, not the disciples, distribute the bread and the fish to the crowd. That always makes me pause, Jesus distributing to more than 5,000 !?

Also in the other gospels, especially Matthew today, cousin John had just been beheaded and Jesus had gone off to be alone and pray. We tend to put our focus upon the "miracle" of fives loaves, two fish among so many! Rather than the hurting Jesus?

In John's gospel, we have the boy who probably like most people on the grassy hill had some food! Namely, the 5 loaves and 2 fish. We skip over the part of the great sadness and grieving of Jesus who looked out upon the crowd that had followed him. And instead of saying go away, come back another day! He had compassion and taught and cured the people. We ponder and wonder the factual feeding and the twelve baskets left over and slip by the REASON - was this all about food and feeding?

Now in all four gospels, the disciples seeing the gravity of the great number of people saying: "ah, Jesus!! time to send them home so they can get their own food."

IN our version today, Jesus says: "you feed them." Question: - could they have gone home and gotten the evening meal the disciples were so worried about? This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves. So evidently it was possible!

For me then, this begs the question, was this all and simply about the miracle of feeding? Was this only to fill the stomachs for one evening of more people than could really be counted? For me, we have a clue in John's gospel, just a little ways past the feeding - It is entitled Bread from Heaven:

John 6:22 - 27

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there. They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.^[a] ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that

endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves! Do not work for the food that perishes. We could spend time wondering if the feeding of the five thousand was a moment when the laws of nature were abrogated and tons of food just appeared. OR, the miracle of people being kind and loving because of Jesus and his teaching and his curing. So they gave of what they had, like the boy? Both miracles of a sort!

It really isn't important, so much as understanding the "why." Having a picnic on a grassy hill would have lasted an evening. But it would not have lasted an eternity. Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:9-10 *"I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

IN the Living Lutheran, August 2020, "Miracles Abound": IN April, the Grand Canyon Synod was awarded \$10,000 from the COVID-19 Response Fund to assist Native American and Latino ministries with food, water and hygiene items. Deborah Hutterer, synod bishop, issued a challenge to match the amount. Within a week, the synod had raised \$13,700. "Miracles abound. IN a crisis this church responded generously and quickly," she said. "Just as God pours out love with great abandon for us, we get to use the resources given to let that love flow in tangible ways, like providing basic needs to our neighbors in need."

Our God is a God of abundance, look at the many Psalms: 103:2-5: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits - who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeem your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

So here is the "food for thought!" Jesus plainly and clearly says don't come after me because I gave you bread to eat. Seek that which is eternal.

Which brings me back to Isaiah 55:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

Is this passage really about well water? About wine and milk? About bread? Much like the story of the feeding of the five thousand satisfying for a bit but growling stomachs the next day.

Metaphor - Why do you spend your money for that which is not “bread.” Rather than the bread of life.

That is why Isaiah says: “Listen carefully to me, eat what is good. Incline your ear and come to me. Listen, so that you may live.”

Jesus was not happy for the people followed but for the bread baked on hot stones rather than the corner stone of life. What is it that WE seek in this world? Satisfying retirement incomes. Vacation spots. Being able to change out from clothes that are spring, winter, fall and summer. Driving the car that we enjoy.

I suppose these things could be considered “bread” and at times satisfying and maybe miraculous. But I don’t believe the beginning of Isaiah is calling us to that: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.”

Jesus was calling for a change. A change of connection and heart. Connection to one another and heart that beats closer to God. You remember often, how patient Jesus had to be with the disciples who just didn’t understand.

The Gate and Good Shepherd and sheep who know his voice. But to know his voice is allowing the Spirit to guide and intercede.

Verse 8 of Isaiah: “For my thought are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

That is why God became flesh. Rather than portents from just prophets. He gave promise of life through his Son, Jesus the Christ.

A story to close: Did you know that back in 1996 “backrub” was the original name for “google?” The name was probably a reference to the underlying algorithm which counts backlinks as affirmative votes. What makes a page popular!

Now, we use the word “Google” in all sorts of sentences. We “google” our friends, families, strangers, ourselves. We “google” anywhere we can reach the Internet – airports, hotels, looking for jobs. Google has become such a common thing in our world, we don’t even think about it anymore.

But Google wasn’t always so big. The company started in a friends’ basement in Menlo Park, California In 1997 they decided that the search engine needed a new name.

Google’s history page says the name is “a play on the word ‘googol,’ a mathematical term for the number represented by the numeral 1 followed by 100 zeros. So, thankfully, now we’re talking about “googling” each other instead of “backrubbing” each other. Aren’t you glad? I know I am!!! Starting with 2 people to what it is now! Wow! For them maybe miracle. But also connecting people.

What is the message from the feeding of the five thousand? Why is it paired with the Isaiah 55 passage? Can you and I in faithful love take a “little,” knowing it will become more?

Jesus is teaching a different heart. God is asking us to listen - incline your ear, Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Calling upon him is not just in devotional prayer but in giving yourself away to others in so many ways.

The “sign” that Jesus accomplished on the grassy hillside is offering and “doing for others.” Giving whatever it is we have: Maybe it is bread, but maybe it is more? Perhaps it’s the gift of time, the gift of an understanding ear? The gift of a ride to church (when we finally can offer rides!) The gift of a smile for a stranger...when masks come off...or maybe even politeness before the masks come off. The gift of old clothes for those in need. Food to a food pantry. The gift of kindness whatever form that may take.

“HO, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and you that have no money, come, but and eat.!”

That gift is given in Jesus to you! Whatever you bring before God will be more than enough. There is no lack in God. There is nothing but abundance. There is more in God than you could ever ask or imagine. As we trust and move in our faithfulness, there will always be baskets and baskets of leftover blessings.

Amen.