

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 14, 2021, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: John 6:1-15

***"Beyond Our Wildest Dreams"***

How often have you gone on a day trip or maybe driven a day or two to get to your destination and may have packed a meal or two to eat along the way – and don't forget snacks? Maybe you are going to play in a baseball tournament, or maybe you are going to play baseball in town, and you know it will be a doubleheader? You might be going to some sporting event and you know it will take a few hours, and so you pack some food. It is usually with the knowledge of the distance and your plan while you are going to be there. Can you just imagine five thousand men and their families going on a journey to hear Jesus speak and maybe even witness Him healing people while there – and not bring something to eat? It might very well have been that they had no idea what was ahead of them and how long Jesus would speak and mingle with the people there.

Of course they knew their history - that God had fed the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, with a special kind of bread – a 'bread from heaven' which we can read in Exodus 16, where the 'manna' was provided daily by God because the people are grumbling and complaining. God gave those people manna in the morning and quail in the evening. That was years ago and I am sure those people did not expect that to happen again. But, today's Holy Gospel, gives us the account of Jesus doing something even better – with His own provision of food for that large crowd out in an area, across the Sea of Galilee away from towns where food might have been found. There was no Chick-Fil-A, no Harvey's, no Walmart, Lord knows there was no Kroger's or Publix. It was a very remote area – but Jesus had compassion for them and stepped up to help them. Remarkably, later in this sixth chapter of John's Gospel there is a long discussion of 'the bread from heaven.' The Bible says that Jesus said a prayer and all of a sudden people were fed. This is about the power of Jesus and His ministry and the ministry of His followers.

It was springtime, and the Gospel tells us that Passover was near. We know this is the spring because we are told that there was plenty of grass – and that only happens in this area as the springtime is when there is rain and the melting of the snow peaks in the mountains causes the River and Lake to fill. Jesus asks Philip, "*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*" (John 6:5) And so Philip answered him, "*Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!*" Our dear St. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter spoke up and said: "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?*" (John 6:9) Either this boy or his Mom had a plan to go see Jesus and make provision – just like if you were going to a sporting event. Andrew and Philip knew that they had no solution to the problem, but they certainly knew to bring what was available to Jesus. You can never tell what He is going to do with it—and part of Christian faith is the expectation that Jesus will do something we hadn't even thought of - something new and creative – and probably spectacular. The reaction of the people—and the response of Jesus to their reaction – are both very telling.

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Jesus told the Apostles to have the people sit down. There was about five thousand men, a pretty huge crowd by any standards, but that did not include women and children, who were probably grouped separately for the meal according to Jewish custom. The number was probably at least doubled and possibly even tripled! Can you imagine the numbers there on that hillside that day?

Jesus spoke the customary Jewish blessing over the loaves and the fish – giving thanks. He most probably said “*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melekh Ha Olam. Asher kidshanu beedvarecha, v’natanlanu, veetzi vanu, l’hioator laolam.*” “*Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth*” Jesus wanted the people to see that the object of the blessing was not the food, but God who gave it. Jesus looked up to heaven, in dependence on the Father for a miraculous provision of food. Then He broke the loaves into pieces, and then divided the fish into portions, and gave, which in the Greek imperfect tense used - said “kept giving” the portions to His disciples to them give to the people. How the miracle itself took place is not stated, but the tense of the verb “gave” would indicate that the bread multiplied in Jesus’ hands. You want to talk about spectacular! The correlation to the Israelites in the wilderness is so important because once again God is providing the bread to His people – in the person of Jesus of Nazareth – the long-promised Messiah. Like the manna in the wilderness, God provided much more than they needed – so much that they had as much as they wanted – and imagine the people who had not packed a meal and were now very blessed beyond their wildest dreams.

Can you just imagine being present and seeing that the supply of food never ran out – and that there were 12 baskets full of leftovers? What a loving and amazing God. John puts it this way: “*After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*” (John 6:14-15) By the way – this took place at the place called Tabgha on the Sea of Galilee. The mountain that Jesus withdrew to, right behind it, would later become known as the Mount of Beatitudes. But wait, this site where Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed over five thousand, is the place where bread and fish were also served when the Risen Jesus appeared to the Apostles in John Chapter 21. Jesus asked them, “*Children, have you caught anything?*” They had been out all night and caught nothing. Jesus told them to go back put and put their nets out on the other side. That is a whole ‘nother Gospel for another day. Understands this – God loves to use the same place for us to understand His glory and what He has in store for His children.

The Apostles and followers of Jesus learned some important lessons on that day, on the grassy side of the Sea of Galilee, during the second year of Jesus’ ministry. We know it is year two – because the third year at Passover what when He was killed. They learned that spiritual responsibility is never limited by human ability. Each and every breath is a gift from God – and this teaches us to depend totally upon Him. How many of us wake up in the morning and say thank you God for another day? Thank you for my family, thank you for my Saint Andrew’s

family! It is a precious gift for us to be here today – in fact it is a precious gift to be anywhere today.

In this situation – even though there was only a small amount of food; five small barley loaves and two small, pickled fish – God was there. Jesus accepted the gift from this young man that Andrew presented, and He multiplied it more than five thousand-fold. If we give to God all that we are and have – our time, our talents, our prayers, or possessions – He will make them go further than we would have ever thought possible.

What Jesus did that day began the many wonders would take place recorded in the rest of John's sixth chapter; Jesus walking on the water, Jesus proclaiming that *"I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life, I am the bread of life."* *"Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* (John 6:47-51) Only Jesus can fill us with more than we could possibly imagine.

And so I want to pose this question to you: If you were Andrew – would you have presented this young boy and his very small meal to Jesus? Thank God for Andrew, and thank God for the faith that was present that day – and for the people that received each and every morsel - from which we can learn so much. Trusting in Jesus can bring great blessings – beyond our wildest dreams!