

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:30-44

"Believe the Miracle"

If you are on Facebook and you log in with a reminder that 7 years ago this happened, or 4 years ago this happened, well, today it told me that seven years ago today we were in Israel and we were leading that group of nineteen people, but that's not where I am going. I want to tell you about something that happened eighteen years ago this weekend when, after finishing my first year in seminary, in the Pittsburgh area at Trinity School for Ministry. I was asked to help out my good friend Dave and fill in for him leading the worship music of the Saturday night service at his field study parish. I brought my guitar and my family; it was a rather liberal church in the Diocese of Pittsburgh that was led by a conservative rector. Not only was Dave not going to be there, but neither was the rector! We had a supply priest who was a member of that church, and he filled in for the rector that night. The Gospel was Mark 6:30-44 about the feeding of the five thousand. The service was rather uneventful until the sermon. When this priest began to speak – there was horror on the faces of me and my family, some of the people present, and even the deacon who was serving in that parish. His jaw dropped down as well. This priest began to tell us that the only miracle that took place was the fact that the people who had brought food – which was kept hidden, and that they decided to share what they had and it was more than enough. Of course, He could not explain how twelve baskets full of food were left over. I am quite proud of the fact that my son John kept shaking his head, and especially for the fact that our daughter Theresa, who was then just 10 years old, told her mom, in her “outside voice” – “that’s not what happened!” Even kids can tell when they are being sold a bill of goods!

Up to this point, we had only attended churches of sound doctrine – that believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and of His power and authority over all things – even bread and fish! At this church we were force fed a sermon of the most horrible drivel – straight out of the “progressive” seminaries – which was not about what God could and would do, but it was about all that humanity can do. This was our very first “close up” introduction to the substitution of the Church of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with the more culture driven “Church of I, Me, Mine.” What astonishing deception – what unbelievable twisting of the truth – to rob Jesus of His majesty – instead, bathing mankind with all of the glory. There is no miracle in sharing – there is however a miracle in and through the Lord Jesus Christ – taking five loaves and two fish – and feeding thousands of people – leaving twelve baskets of leftovers.

It is important to note that all of the four Gospel tell the account of this miracle, and the detail is remarkable, and so detailed that they must have come from people who were there as eyewitnesses. This is not a made-up story – about sharing and caring, but about compassion and love – in and through the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ – and the ministry of His followers. It happened during springtime, and so the people sat on the green grass in groups of hundreds and fifties.

Jesus instructed the apostles to stop grumbling about getting rid of the people – and He told them: "You give them something to eat." Jesus insisted they find out what bread was available, probably back at the boat and also in the crowd. The disciples returned with the answer: a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. The Gospel of John says that they were five small barley loaves and two small fish – belonging to a young boy. Jesus emphasized the word YOU – in Greek ὑμεῖς *humeis* – reminding the apostles to always start with what YOU have before you ask God to give you more. By telling them "*You give them something to eat*" Jesus expresses the impossibility of His command given their resources. A denarius, the coin of the day, equaled a day's wages. Two hundred denarii, assuming that would be enough to feed the crowd, certainly represented more than their meager resources could cover.

I want to stress to you that the miracle took place in Jesus' hands, not in the hands of the apostles; for whatever we give to Him, He can bless and multiply. They were not the manufacturers – but the distributors!

Jesus spoke the customary Jewish blessing over the loaves and the fish. "*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.*" "Blessed art You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth" The object of the blessing was not the food, but God who gave it. Jesus looked up to heaven, depending on God the Father for a miraculous provision of food. Then He broke the loaves into pieces, divided the fish into portions, and gave, which the Greek imperfect tense used said "kept giving", the portions to His disciples to them to give to the people. How the miracle itself took place is not stated, but the tense of that verb "gave" I believe indicates that the bread was multiplied in Jesus' hands.

The count of 5,000 men, a pretty huge crowd by any standards, did not include women and children, who were probably grouped separately for the meal according to Jewish custom. It is interesting. We have some friends who are Jewish on Long Island and we have attended their synagogue, an Orthodox Synagogue. The women have to sit behind a curtain, on the left-hand side of the synagogue, and the men are on the right-hand side. Kind of ancient if you will, but we honored that. Marilyn and Helene sat behind the curtain. It was probably set that way, but we do not know for sure, because Scripture does not tell us. The number could have easily been doubled! To think that a family of three or four could have been there, and suddenly five thousand grows exponentially. And that makes the miracle even bigger!

The disciples help to share in Jesus' ministry by

- taking the initiative,
- directly participating in obtaining the food – the five loaves and two fish,
- and by distributing what Jesus had multiplied.

Jesus was revealing to the world just who He really was and charging His apostles with following His instructions. Last week we talked extensively about how we are called to follow Jesus' instructions. Jesus is still asking, to this day, for us to follow His instructions. If we

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follow Jesus' instructions to evangelize, to preach and teach His Gospel, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and obeying everything He has commanded – then our love for one another will have us living His Gospel – and we have no need for any other gospel or replacement theology! Jesus' words "*You give them something to eat*" were meant for that specific event, but can indeed be heard loud and clear in Matthew chapter 25 when Jesus tells about the sheep and the goats: when the Son of Man tells the "sheep" "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*" He goes on to tell the "goats": "*'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.*" Living the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and following His instructions in His Holy Word – is the prescription that is needed to end world hunger, to help cure illness and disease – and that includes everyone!

In closing, I want to remind you that of the throngs of people present that day, Jesus "*had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd*" (Mark 6:34) He was and is their Shepherd and was going to show them, and provide for them in His instructions to His followers. After His death and resurrection – the risen Jesus reminded Peter and the rest at the shore of the Sea Of Galilee – after He fed them breakfast. He asked Peter three times, "do you love me?" He then told Peter, "*feed my lambs,*" then He said, "*tend my sheep*" and finally "*feed my sheep.*" (John 21) This was transforming Peter from a fisherman to a shepherd. My brothers and sisters in Christ - those instructions from Jesus have no expiration date – non-negotiable, and are just as true today – physically and spiritually - to each one of us. "*You give them something to eat!*"