

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:30-44

“Even Making Leftovers”

Jesus and the Apostles were looking for some alone time – it seems pretty clear in today's Holy Gospel that a break from the needs of the people, who seemed to be everywhere. The short time that they were alone on the boat was the only time that they had to share together. The plan was that they were going to get some alone time – and so Jesus said to them, "*Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.*" (Mark 6:31) As the Gospel says, "*so they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*" (Mark 6:32) The only problem was when they landed on the shore – they were confronted by crowds of people – all of whom had needs and wanted those needs or healings met by Jesus. Their needs were so great that they didn't even give Jesus and the apostles a chance to eat. The people must have recognized where there were going so they ran on foot to get ahead of them.

Remember, the Apostles had just returned from their mission of going out “two by two” and ministering to those who were receptive of Jesus' message and shaking the dust off their sandals as a sign to those who rejected it. They were probably exhausted and more in need of telling Jesus about it all; to unwind and brief Him of the details, even though He knew. Immediately before the Apostles arrived Jesus had gotten word about the beheading of John the Baptist. We need to understand the frame of mind that must have all been in. Several of these Apostles were followers of John the Baptist - John and Andrew were present at the Baptism of Jesus. Here this preacher – this itinerant preacher had been beheaded by the king. Not only did the Apostles need a rest, but I would venture to say that Jesus did too, but the people had another idea. They were, as Jesus noticed, without any real leadership – and so He, being the loving Lord that He is, had compassion on them. They were as He said, "*like sheep without a shepherd.*" The king of Judah – Herod is off in his palace living the life and surrounding himself with people who adored him and wanted to do nothing more than just party with him. The Temple leadership are put there, as was the Herod family, at the favor of Rome. The people needed someone to lead them, to care for them – and so Jesus compassionately started to teach them.

All four of the Gospels give a very detailed account of the miraculous event that was to come, that conveyed the compassion and love of Jesus – and His willingness to provide for those who are His disciples. We are not talking about Apostles – we are talking about disciples - His followers – people who believed in Jesus. This was a perfect example of Jesus' desire to reach out in love and to use His power to benefit others – for no other reason than His love and compassion for them. He certainly did not do it to prove anything – that was not His agenda. Jesus told His disciples to stop worrying about getting rid of the people – and He told them: "*You give them something to eat.*" Jesus insisted that they find out what bread was available, to check and see what might be back at the boat or also from the crowd. The disciples returned with the answer: there were only five loaves of bread and two fish. The Gospel of John tells us that they were five small barley loaves and two fish – belonging to a young boy. I find it amazing that Jesus emphasized the word YOU in order to remind the Apostles to start with

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what you've got before you ask God to give you more. By telling them "*You give them something to eat*" and since a denarius equaled a day's wages, that would mean it would take about two hundred fifty denarii to feed the crowd, I believe that Jesus was showing them how impossible this would be for the whole crowd and that it was probably more than all of their resources could cover, plus this was a remote place and there were certainly no Harvey's, or Walmart's, or even Publix supermarkets in those days, and probably not even "joe the Fishmonger" to be able to go and get 5,000 fish to go! No, I don't think so.

One more important note: Jesus told them to sit down on the green grass. This is a key to the time of year – it has to be springtime. If you have ever been to the Galilee you know that the grass grows quickly in the spring, but when the rains end in May, it easily scorches in the heat. This must have been near or around Passover time. The people sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. This is important.

Jesus took the bread and gave thanks to God the Father for providing the bread and broke the five loaves. Each piece was touched by Him as He then gave the bread to His disciples, so that they might give them to the people. Jesus then divided the two fish among the disciples, who made sure that everyone got some. Jesus' merely touching these provisions miraculously multiplied both the bread and the fish – so that everyone there not only got some – but the Gospel says, "*They all ate and were satisfied.*"

During our vacation Bible school, I commented how many of our folks from St. Andrew's waited before going to get their dinner, in order to allow the children and our guests to go first. I notice that it happens at every Parish dinner as well, and I think it is a perfect example of the gift of hospitality that this church has. It is something that I was taught as a youngster and we called it FHB – Family Hold Back – and apparently many here learned that as well. The disciples made sure that everyone ate, and I am sure it was not until everyone ate that they got to have some. Miraculously, from 5 small barley loaves and two fish – there were twelve baskets of leftovers. That is an important number – remember that number. Whether the people there realized it or not, God had not only given them the gift of His presence and teaching that day, but He provided and freely made sure that they had their fill – being "*satisfied.*" The Gospel says that there were five thousand men.

There may be some confusion of this miracle with another – some saying Jesus only fed the multitude once. I want to clear that up for you. This is clearly the first of Jesus' miracles of feeding a multitude. I am going to ask you to open your Pew Bibles to page 1569, Mark Chapter 8, and let's start with verse 2. Jesus said "*I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.*" His disciples answered, "*But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?*" "*How many loaves do you have?*" Jesus asked. "*Seven,*" they replied. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. They had a few

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small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.” (Mark 8:2-8) It says that about four thousand were present.

There are great similarities in these accounts, but they are different. Mark Chapter 6 – Mark Chapter 8. As I mentioned at the beginning of this message from Mark chapter six, that it was recorded in all four Gospels as the feeding of the five thousand. This next miracle was recorded in only Mark chapter 8 and Matthew chapter fifteen and took place at a later date. We don't know what time of year, because we don't know the condition of the grass. If God wants you to know something – He will tell you that. If He wanted us to know what fruit it was in the Garden of Eden – that many people say is an apple – it could have been a kumquat or even a banana. All we know is that it the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That is all we know. We don't know what time of year it was, but what is important is the difference in the number fed, the number of loaves of bread, the fish, and the leftovers. All of these numbers are significant to us. Some people have confused the two and even think that they are the same event. I want it to be clear for you. Since you are already open to Mark chapter 8 – look at verse 16 on page 1570.

The apostles were discussing what happened and why. They said, *"It is because we have no bread." Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? **When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve,"** they replied. **"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven."** He said to them, *"Do you still not understand?"* (Mark 8:16-21) Jesus' own words clearly identified these as different events – and significance of the numbers seven and twelve.*

One more thing – it is fascinating that only the numbers of men were recorded. The reason is a whole different discussion for a whole different reason – but if you think about it – four thousand men or five thousand men grows significantly if you add their wives and even some children, making it easily fifteen thousand or twelve thousand – which significantly grows if there are other children – adding more oomph to this miracle. From five loaves and two fish or from seven loaves and several fish. That tells us that there is nothing is too big, or too small for Jesus to provide for – even making leftovers as well.