

Saint Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

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

Scripture: John 6:4-15

“A Miracle in Progress ”

In first century Israel, most especially during the time of today's Holy Gospel, the news wasn't great. There was questionable leadership, made up of both the government leaders - and as I reminded you last week, the religious leaders as well.

- There was tragedy,
- there was a lack of faith,
- but on the other hand there were also miracles and signs of hope.

The evidence is there for us to see - all we have to do is check the Gospel of John! You might recall at the very beginning of Lent I suggested that if there was something that you were going to give up – it didn't need to be chocolate – the most precious gift would have been time!

Taking just a half hour a day, or less and reading just a half a chapter of the Gospel of John. It would bless and enlighten you and I pray that if you are doing that you are seeing miracle after miracle and wonders being done in the Name of Jesus.

In it we learn that the people of Israel were walking around “*like sheep without a shepherd.*” They were longing for deliverance from their struggles – being suppressed by Rome. Jesus saw that they were spiritually hungry and thirsting for words of righteousness. These people were ravenous and had no faithful, spiritual pastors to feed them with knowledge and understanding. The Scribes and Pharisees were supposed to lead them and guide them, but these men, who were supposed to be their shepherds, were blinded by their own sin and mostly their own “self-righteousness.” They were pretty impressed with themselves! I would like to suggest to you that these “spiritual leaders” were **not leaders at all**, but were men who were out only for their own gain and for the people to praise and exalt them and give reverence for the position that they held. Because they had no shepherds, the people of Israel were dying from a starvation for the truth. There was no spiritual food being given to them in their synagogues. Their king was off in one of his many luxurious palaces, or carousing with his cohorts, lusting after women, and beheading prophets. Let's face it - these people were desperate for leadership, and they were left destitute and hopeless - there seemed to be absolutely no way out for them.

And then into their lives walks a Man from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth. Right in their very midst was a teacher, a preacher, a rabbi, a minister, a prophet, a healer and someone who came upon them like a “breath of fresh air” to the hungry souls and hopeless existence that they were living. Jesus' reputation had spread like wildfire. His name had become very well-known and everyone could tell that this man was different. He was not just some scribe who only cared for His own fortune; this man named Jesus (Yeshua) was different.

- He was a man who showed that He had compassion;
- a man who had answers for their questions,
- and more importantly - here was a man who actually practiced what He preached.
- His words were powerful, informative and refreshing to one's soul.
- His words brought hope and a newness of life that every person longed for.

- He “walked the talk” and so they followed Him relentlessly.

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 followers. 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. Jesus told His disciples to stop worrying about getting rid of the people – and He told them in the Gospels of Mark and Luke: “*You give them something to eat.*” Jesus insisted that the disciples 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: as a matter of fact it is our beloved St. Andrew who brought the answer that 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 small fish – belonging to a young boy. Jesus emphasized the word YOU in order to remind the disciples to start with what YOU’VE got before you ask God to give you more. By telling them “*You give them something to eat*” and given that a denarius equaled a day’s wages, so two hundred denarii would be enough to feed the crowd, I believe that Jesus was stressing the sheer impossibility of their doing this for the whole crowd and that it was probably more than their resources could cover.

The disciples had just returned from the “road trip” that Jesus had sent them on - being empowered to heal and perform miracles - “two by two.” I think it is important for us to remember that **this incredible miracle took place in Jesus’ own hands and not in the hands of the disciples.** You see, whatever we give to Him, Jesus can bless and multiply. Isn’t it remarkable to have a Lord and Savior who can solve our every problem, meet our every need, and then enable us to minister to others – just as that day on the Galilee almost two thousand years ago?

I have to share with you an event that took place in 2003, in a suburb of Pittsburgh. I was asked to lead worship with my guitar, filling in for another seminarian who was away, along with the rector of that church at a retreat. Not only did they have a substitute singer, but they had a substitute priest and preacher. The Gospel was about the feeding of the 5,000. When this “guest” priest began to preach, to my shock he quickly took the power away from Jesus and gave it to the crowd! He called this - not a miracle by Jesus - but “the miracle of sharing!” He said the crowd followed the example of the young boy who offered his 5 loaves and 2 fish –and they shared their lunch as well. I can vividly remember the words our daughter Theresa blurted out in this church in absolute disbelief – she said “that’s not what happened!” I am so pleased to tell you that the words of this young lady quickly restored the blessing of the miracle by Christ – to those present – except the preacher.

Oh how I wish we could have seen Jesus as He gave the customary Jewish blessing over the loaves and the fish. He most probably said “*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam, ha'motzi lehem min ha-aretz.*” (ברוך אתה ה' א-לוהינו מלך העולם, המוציא לחם מן הארץ.) “*Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*”

The remarkable and wonderful thing is that **the blessing was not of the food**, but of God who gave it! Jesus looked up to heaven, trusting in the Father for a miraculous provision of food. Then He broke the loaves into pieces, divided the fish into portions, and **gave**, (which in the Greek imperfect tense used, meant “**kept giving**”) it just didn’t stop! How do you get 12 baskets of leftovers from 5 loaves and 2 fish? Certainly not from neighbors pulling out of their pouches their lunch! God Almighty made something happen through His Son – and Jesus gave the portions to His disciples to then give to the people. Little by little, piece by piece, Jesus began to break away pieces of bread and fish. The more He broke off and gave away, the more that was left. Can you just imagine what a miracle that was? You see, Jesus didn’t take that fish and turn them into two giant whales that would have been enough for everyone all at once. Just the same as He didn’t turn those five loaves of bread into giant Wonder Breads so that everyone could take as much as they wanted. **Little by little, piece by piece**, Jesus would take a piece and give it away until all 5,000 men and their wives and children were filled.

The provision of this miracle was extraordinary and abundant. 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. The final number was probably like 10,000 or more! Could you imagine if I asked our ushers to only count the men when they come in to the service? Look around you – and think how the numbers would change!

Jesus’ words “*You give them something to eat*” were specifically meant for that particular event, but those words cause my heart to stir and my mind to jump instantly to 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.*” Jesus 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.*” His words are also the fulfillment of what was prophesied in 2 Kings 4:43 regarding twenty loaves of bread when the man of God said “*Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'they shall eat and have some left over.'*” This miracle, with leftovers, was not just a surprise – it had been foretold – years before!

On a nearby mountain hillside in that very same Galilee region, Jesus taught these words in Matthew chapter 5:6 called the Beatitudes: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*” In a time filled with unrighteousness and a people searching for a shepherd – Jesus Christ’s words ring so true. There was questionable leadership, both in government as well as religious leaders. There was tragedy, there was a lack of faith, but on the other hand there were also miracles and signs of hope. Well, this time I am not talking about two thousand years ago but instead I am speaking of today. Isn’t it funny that we look back at the times when Christ lived and think how much we have grown – and how

Fourth Sunday In Lent, March 15, 2015, Year B

primitive those times were compared to today? But have we really grown? Leadership today may have more bells, buzzers and whistles – but we only need to look at the news and see the leaders – both political and spiritual - who are doing the “same old, same old” that was being done in the first century.

- Religious freedoms are being threatened and are being taken away – there are issues regarding health care and personal rights.
- We are surrounded by religious leaders who are forsaking the authority of Holy Scripture and trivializing God’s Word calling it a nice story, but just that – a story. Sad to say that there are **people walking around like sheep without a shepherd!**

The answer to all this is still the same – in Psalm 23 in the very first verse, "***The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.***" Jesus is still the only answer for the hunger and thirst in mankind. Today there are multitudes of people that lead their daily lives without a shepherd.

I must tell you that my heart is breaking. Our son John has a friend who just returned from Los Angeles. John is ministering to this young man because he is contemplating suicide. He is wandering around, this young Muslim man, like a sheep without a shepherd. Please pray for Ty! Jesus is the only answer in his life – and in so many.

- I wonder how many people will attend a church today and not hear a message that even mentions the Blood of Jesus, or his sacrifice upon the cross, or his death, burial and resurrection?
- I wonder how many will attend a church today where the name of Jesus isn’t even mentioned; where no message of salvation or repentance is given? Or where the topic of sin is even addressed?
- I wonder how many will attend a church where the Holy Word of God is replaced by poetry readings or prose? In some the words of Buddha or the Koran. It is sad but true!

Living the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and following His instructions that He gave to us in His Holy Word – is the prescription that is needed. **Sharing the Gospel is life giving!** That does not mean standing on a street corner “thumping on your Bible,” or going door to door to preach to people, but instead inviting neighbors and friends to speak with you, it might be on the line at Harvey’s, it could be a Zaxby’s, or it could be a Burger King. Invite neighbors to talk to you. Make them wonder why it is that you are smiling, because you have something, someone in your life that you want to tell them about, sharing the love of Christ in everything you do. Giving people something to eat is not just physical, but it is spiritual as well.

Whatever you have, whoever you are, whatever you can do, no matter how small it may seem in your eyes or in the eyes of others, God can use it to perform a miracle if we submit it into His hands. Can you imagine that young boy who had five small barley loaves and two fish? When he woke up that morning he had no idea of how he was going to help the people present that day, and how the Lord would take his small offering and turn it into an abundant feast – with

leftovers!

I have said it before and you know I will say it again – that “**Jesus loves you just the way you are – but He loves you too much to leave you that way.**” Jesus loves all of us so much that He wants to use us, faults and all, warts and all, doubts and fears, with our limited time, our talents and understanding. He will begin to mold us, to use us, **little by little, piece by piece** until your life is a miracle in progress – being used to build and feed His kingdom. I believe we will witness a miracle – one that will come with leftovers!