

Sermon on Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand

Matthew 14: 13-21

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.
AMEN

This morning's Gospel reading starts just after Jesus and his Apostles have just finished teaching and healing to the people in and around Galilee. As Jesus was about to begin his journey south to Jerusalem, He received word that his cousin John also known as John the Baptist was just killed by Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch. Herod was the son of Herod the Great and inherited Galilee and Perea from his father. The south boundary of Perea borders on the north end of the Dead Sea and the west boundary on the Jordan River.

As you may already know most of Jesus' ministry was in and around Galilee and upon receiving the news about John He wanted to go to a desolate place, most likely to reflect on the death of John. Also, to prevent an escalation of anger from the Jews in the area until the time came for His predicted death and betrayal. A few verses back Jesus had some confrontations with the Pharisees and other people about the law and things were getting a bit tense.

St. Jerome in his commentary tells us that when Jesus heard about John's death, he withdrew to a lonely place apart, but not as some people think, for fear of death. Jesus withdrew to spare his enemies from adding to one murder the murder of another or perhaps to defer His death until the Feast of the Passover. Matthew in his Gospel says that He withdrew rather than fleeing to a lonely place. To have used the word "fled" would indicate that He feared his persecutors. To

withdraw tells us that He avoided His persecutors. For those of you who don't know who St. Jerome was: He lived around 345-420 AD and was a priest in the Church as well as a prolific writer and theologian. He wrote commentaries and translated many works and one of his greatest achievements was the translation of most of the Bible into Latin, called the Vulgate, from the original language or tongues as some call it.

Even after the confrontations Jesus had with the Jews in the area, He still had a large group of people that wanted to follow Him. They were interested in hearing what Jesus had to say to them. Jesus was not severe with those who disagreed with Him. He always remained calm except for the time when He over turned the tables of the money changers outside the Temple walls.

As Jesus and His Apostles withdrew, the people He had been preaching to followed them. The hour was getting late and the people were hungry.

This Gospel reading is in all three of the first Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke called the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called Synoptic because they share a common perspective in how they view the life and teaching of Jesus. Merriam-Webster defines synoptic 1. Affording a general view of a whole. 2. Manifesting or characterized by comprehensiveness. This particular reading was so important that all four writers felt it necessary to include it in their writings.

The story tells us that there were 5,000 men plus women and children present. If we make the assumption that each man was married and

they each had at least one child that would account for at least 15,000 people.

The Apostles told Jesus that “the day is now over, send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “They need not go away; **you give them something to eat.**” They replied to Jesus and told Him that they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Now bread and fish was a staple most of these people in this area ate. They were of modest income and they lived around the Sea of Galilee.

In this story Jesus performed a miracle which has both Old Testament and Messianic connotations. Now in the Old Testament there are a couple of stories where God provided food for people in need. The first one I want to mention is in 1 Kings 17:9-16 God told Elijah “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you. So, he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” And she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat and die.” And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and Elijah and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour never ran

out, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD spoken to Elijah.

In 2 Kings 4:42-44 we read, A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" So, he repeated, "Give to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD 'They shall eat and have some left.'" So, he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

These two stories share something in common with today's reading. The host just has a little food and says they do not have enough for them to share.

Back to the feeding of the 5,000 or more likely the 15,000. Jesus in a veiled way had manifested Himself as the Messiah by feeding the 5,000. The feeding did not convince the Apostles yet that Jesus was the Messiah. That will occur a few verses later when He walks on the water. And calms the raging sea. Jesus took the two fish and five loaves of bread and He looked up to Heaven and said a blessing and God provided an abundance just as he did for the Israelites in their journey to the Promise Land where He provided bread from Heaven and meat in the form of quails. He also provided an abundance of water for them to drink too. God's providential care can be counted on to supply our bare necessities. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to "give us this day our daily bread."

In all three of the Synoptic Gospels Jesus told the Apostles "you give them something to eat."

Back in Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus told the people “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing: Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life: And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like any of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we drink? Or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

St. Hilary of Poitiers who lived from 315-367 or 368 was a leading theologian and writer in what is today known as France at his time, tells us in his commentary on Matthew that up until this time the only Bible the people had was the Pentateuch which could have been represented by the five loaves of bread. The two fish could be a representation of the teachings of the prophets and the Gospel of John. In another commentary the 12 baskets left over could have represented the 12 tribes of Israel as well as the abundance of God’s provision.

In Matthew we are not told what the bread is made out of, but when we read in John’s Gospel, we are told the bread is made out of barley. You may wonder why John mentions barley. Barley was crushed first to make it usable for making bread. He mentions it because he wants us to

trample underfoot the pride of costly living. Jesus, in breaking the bread makes it into a seed bed of food. Five whole loaves would not go very far.

The whole purpose of this miracle is to teach the Apostles and us about humility, temperance, charity, and to be of like mind towards others. Jesus treated everyone assembled there on the grass the same whether they were rich or poor. Jesus wants us to do the same.

A few weeks ago, we did a food drive here for the new food bank in Douglas. I would like to continue this collection and once a month or more so we can help the hungry. By contributing our abundance, we can help feed the hungry.

By the way this is the only miracle story that is the same in all four Gospels.

I want to close by reading a poem. Many of you may have heard some or all of it.

The poem is by Annie Johnson Flint

Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;
He has no tongues but our tongues
To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
To bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible
The careless world will read;
We are the sinner's Gospel,
We are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message,

Given in deed and word;
What if the type is crooked?
What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy
With work other than His?
What if our feet are walking
Where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking
Of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him
And hasten His return?

Let us pray: Inspire and strengthen us, O Lord God, by thy holy Spirit, to seek thy will and uphold thine honor in all things; in the purity and joy of our homes, in the trust and fellowship of our common life, in daily service of the good; after the pattern and in the power of thy Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.