

Sermon for July 18, 2021

In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus feeds the 5000.

Mark 6:30-44

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

What are we to make of this? How shall we interpret it? It's a miracle story. From 5 loaves and 2 fish, Jesus feeds 5000 men; presumably this does not include women and children, so the actual numbers might be higher. But probably not. More than likely it is a generic term for people... mankind. Rather like in the Creed where it says for us MEN and our salvation.... It can be confusing. (That's one reason I prefer the LBW version of the creed that simply says, for US and OUR salvation. I'm not a huge fan of using inclusive language on the whole, but there are some concessions that would prove helpful in our postmodern culture.) Just like the world today wants to argue with so much... For example, how unlikely it would be that among 5000 people there would only be five loaves and two fish to eat? That's why liberal scholars like to dismiss the miracle altogether and try to tell us this was a lesson in sharing and not an actual miracle with 12 full baskets of leftovers. The claim being, when the child showed himself willing to share HIS lunch, everyone was humbled and were willing to share the food they had hidden among them. Lame... but that is the state of much of Christianity today. So, Jesus works a miracle and feeds 5000 people. Jesus is God. We know this... so what is the point of the story for us? Maybe it's the circumstances?

In Mark's gospel two things have just taken place. John the Baptist was beheaded. And the disciples had just returned from a tour of duty, preaching repentance, and casting out demons in groups of two... working with limited resources and dealing with people in need and in opposition to them. They were worn out. Jesus agrees that they are in need of a little R&R...

But they arrive on the other side of the lake only to discover more work is ahead of them...

Jesus is ready to go to work, but the disciples, I think, are a little annoyed.

With John's execution, Jesus probably welcomes the distraction of work to do.

But come 5:00 it's quitting time for the disciples. "Let's send them on home, before the burden falls on us as HOSTS. Even if there were a local grocer, and even if he had the goods to sell us... it would cost us more than we have to feed them, even some bread. So... we're beat down and tired, let's tell them to pack it in, shall we?"

There are times when I get annoyed with the disciples, you know?

But there are times where I get annoyed with Jesus too.

The other day I watched an old episode of The Office that I hadn't seen before. It was St.

Patrick's day and everyone in the office was looking forward to going out and celebrating after work. But the new corporate owner was in town on an inspection and she liked to work late.

She was from Georgia and didn't see why anyone cared about a silly holiday like St. Patrick's.

So the whole office had to stay late and work as long as she did. And when anyone tried to bug out after 5:00 she made them feel guilty, and made it seem like their jobs were on the line.

This incident reminded me of that episode. And it reminded me of the kind of things my 8th grade English teacher Mrs Rose would say.

"Teacher, It's getting pretty late, How about we send the people home so they can get something to eat?"

"That sounds like a really good idea, but do you know what sounds like an even better idea?"

Why don't YOU give them something to eat?"

Jesus has compassion on them... on the people... not the disciples. The disciples have a shepherd... the people don't.

There is a time to knock off work and take a rest. And there is a time to push through the exhaustion and fatigue and put your nose to the grindstone.

That might not be the central message of this story... but like Prego, the spaghetti sauce... "it's in there."

I've just come back from a little R&R... it was needed. But while I was taking time away I was also still putting a little time in, giving thought to the work that we as a congregation need to do. I appreciate our congregational president, Chris Roark. You should too. And one of the things he is good at is keeping things front and center that need to be front and center. Even if you're tired. Let's not forget about them. After COVID threw a wooden shoe into the machinery, and in addition, Brett Satkowiak took a call to DeMotte... The Vision Planning Committee was grounded before it even got on the runway. Well, Chris Roak didn't want to see that happen and pushed to get it moving again. Which is great... because it needs to.

There is a lot of work ahead of this congregation... those things that I said would change in the next 5 years are starting to arrive on our doorstep. And as exhausted and fatigued and as weary and drained as we might be after COVID and the elections and the riots and the Woke agenda... There is a grand mission that lies before us that God has in mind that we take up and take on.

And there are not going to be the resources to do it... we will have to TRUST in the Lord and PRAY and walk around and TALK to people.

The desire to knock off for the night and send everyone home to do their own things and fend for themselves must be replaced with the attitude that says... YOU provide it. You give them something to eat.

I think we can take that literally and figuratively... Without forgetting what the Bible tells us... That MAN does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And brothers and sisters... you have to be fed on that Word yourselves before you can feed it to others. In a way... you need to be the well from which the waters flow.

Come to the table and eat... receive the forgiveness that feeds your soul. And then share it.

In the days ahead we will be inviting you into the work that must be done. We do not do it alone.

The Lord is with us. And we call on His name.

Amen.