

Sermon - July 28, 2024

As I shared with the children, there's a common thread in our scriptures today, and it's God's provision for those in need. Both in the Old Testament lesson from 2 Kings and in our gospel it's through the provision of bread. It's one of the ways that Jesus makes sure that people are taken care of, but I don't think just the nourishment of their bodies was the point of that miracle. How many times do we kind of miss the point? It happens a lot when teachers are teaching. We think we understand, but there might be something more underneath it. I think the letter to the church in Ephesus, our epistle lesson from Ephesians, helps to point us to that. The church has this letter written, and they are encouraged that they are being prayed for, in verses 18 and 19, "...that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

When we are in need, and I don't know about you but, when I'm hungry I can border on what's called "hangry", you get a little bit antsy, you get a little on edge. It's just a part of how our bodies work. We need to be fed, that's how we keep living. Jesus understands that. There's a crowd that has now gathered around him and they are getting hungry. It's getting to be about dinner time, and I think he's trying to avoid the "hangriness" that can happen, because where two or three are gathered there can be conflict in the midst of them. One of the ways to mitigate that is by breaking bread, because in breaking bread not only are we feeding our bodies but it becomes a social interaction. We have conversation around food. Jesus knows that both of those things need to happen.

So, he looks to the disciples to say, 'OK, what are you going to do about this situation?' He asks Philip specifically, "Where are we to buy bread for all these people...?". Now, we don't often like to think of Jesus as being wily, but I think he had a little bit of an impish streak to him. He could be a little, um, challenging sometimes. I wonder if he had a twinkle in his eye when he asked that question, because the very next phrase tells us, "He said this to test him..." (meaning Philip). Jesus wanted to see what Philip was willing to do for these people, "...for Jesus himself knew what he was already going to do." Philip is stuck in our reality, 'We don't have enough. Six months wages isn't going to buy enough food to feed 5,000.' But, "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish...'" So, there's a boy who is willing to share, but they don't know how that can feed so many, because in our reality it shouldn't. It can't. Physics tells us that little bit of food, unless everybody takes a minuscule piece, is never going to feed that many people. But, "Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down...so they sat down...Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. "

So, there is a couple of imagery things happening here. When else have we heard about Jesus blessing food? This is a foreshadowing to the Last Supper where he will bless the food, give it to his disciples, and tell them to 'do so in remembrance of me.' He looks to God to do what we, in our reality, cannot, he distributed them so that they could eat, "as much as they wanted." Jesus looks beyond the need. We need a certain amount of food just to survive, but Jesus provides beyond that survival. He gives them as much as they *want*. His gift is overflowing for them, and so they all ate. "When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." They end up gathering twelve baskets of food from five loaves and two fish, *twelve* baskets. Jesus doesn't just provide, he provided in abundance. The phrase that he uses, though, touches me, "...so that nothing may be lost." I think there's a duality to that, and John loves duality. Not just that those pieces of food

wouldn't be lost, but they could be used to feed more. I think he's also talking about the people. Jesus doesn't want anyone to not know of God. He wants them gathered so that they can know of God's love.

But the crowd missed the point of the miracle. They have now been fed; they are satisfied; they see that Jesus is going to make sure that they're going to be OK, and so they want to force Jesus to be what they want Jesus to be. They want to make Jesus their king, because it's the king's job to take care of the people, and Jesus just did it in spades; so, they want to keep him. But God will not be pigeonholed into what we want God to be. Jesus will not be just confined to the role that they want him to have, and he leaves. He goes off by himself, so that he can continue to do God's will and not just what the people want. He understands that God wants to provide more than just food. God wants to provide a space to be loved, an opportunity to know our worth, a relationship that goes beyond just our human needs to a reality beyond our world.

He does it again with the disciples. I don't know why they decided to leave the one that they claimed to follow, but when the evening came and Jesus wasn't back they set sail. We don't know why. We don't know if Jesus had already told them, 'The next place we're going to go is this place.' All we know is that they get in a boat and they start to row across the sea. As they go the wind starts to pick up and the seas become rough, and Jesus performs another miracle: he walks on the water. When they see him, that's when they get scared. This is something that shouldn't be. People don't walk on water in a lake, no matter what the jokes tell you; I don't know that there were that many rocks for him to cross for three miles. When they see him his response is, "It is I; do not be afraid." "It is I," could also be translated from the Greek as, "*I am.*" "I am" is the name that God gave to Moses when Moses asked God, 'If somebody asked who you are what shall I say?' God says, "I am who I am." Jesus is claiming his role as God's tool to reach out to God's people. 'I am, God is with you. Don't be afraid.' Now notice in this story Jesus doesn't end the stormy weather, he doesn't calm the sea, he doesn't make the winds cease. He simply says, "I am; don't be afraid", and when they try to bring him to what they want, into the boat, that's when they find the shelter of the shore.

It's interesting to me that in both these stories, both of these miracles, it wasn't the ones that were helped that asked to be helped. The people didn't look to Jesus and say, 'Feed us.' The disciples didn't look to Jesus or cry out to Jesus and say, 'Come save us.' Jesus knew their need and came to them in the midst of the need. In the first case he used his disciples as the tools to meet the need, and in the second case he met his disciples in their need to give them a sense of peace.

It's good to know that God works beyond what we could ever think for God to do; that God is greater than what we could ever confine God to be; and that even in the most challenging times of our lives God is there. God comes to us and meets us where we are, so that we can be cared for. Sometimes he does it for us, and sometimes God uses us to do it for others. So where is God working? Where is God helping us? And then, how is God asking us to participate with God to help others?

Let us pray. Good and Gracious God, we thank you that you go beyond what we could ever peg you to be. That you seek to gather all so that none may be lost. And we thank you that you ask us, and can use us to help make that happen. We pray, Lord God, that you would continue to open our hearts and minds to see you working in our world; and that we would be open to the ways that we can participate in helping to meet those needs. Bless us with your presence, not just now, but always; for we pray to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.