

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 2, 2020
Matthew 14:13-21

“You Give Them Something to Eat”

“Mommmmm... Dadddd... There’s nothing to eat!” How many times have you heard this from your children while they’re rifling through the fridge and cupboards on a food foraging mission? How many times did we ourselves say that to our own parents while we were growing up? And the usual answer that comes from mom or dad is this: “There’s plenty of food in this house for you to eat!” “Grumble, grumble, grumble...” comes the muffled reply from the disgruntled young person in the kitchen. Sound familiar? More often than not, there is indeed plenty of food to eat that’s right under our nose. It might not be exactly what we wanted or what we were looking for, but there is food right there, if we’re willing to accept it. And that’s where the problem lies: we’re not sure we are willing to accept it because it’s not what we were looking for. This helps to set the stage for today’s Gospel lesson as Jesus feeds the 5000 with five loaves and two fish. Jesus’ words to his disciples become the theme for the sermon: **“You give them something to eat”** (Matthew 14:16). May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

We are making our way through Matthew’s Gospel over the course of this year. Today’s Gospel lesson immediately follows the account of John the Baptist’s beheading by Herod (Matthew 14:1-12). Speaking truth to power, then and now, can come at a very high price. Having been informed of John’s grisly death, Jesus understandably seeks to withdraw from the busyness of life, perhaps to grieve in solitude and quiet. But it is not to be. The crowds figure out where Jesus is going in the boat, and get there ahead of him. I don’t know about you, but under these circumstances I don’t think I would have welcomed all those people who were there waiting on the shore. I could see myself becoming resentful and frustrated at my away time being taken away. Thankfully, Jesus responded differently than I would have. Instead of being resentful and frustrated, we read that Jesus **“had compassion on them and healed their sick”** (Matthew 14:14). That’s who Jesus is: full of compassion, mercy and healing, just like the psalm for today tells us: **“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever”** (Psalm 136:1). That recurring refrain in each of the verses of Psalm 136 reminds us over and over again: **“for his steadfast love endures forever.”**

Jesus’ compassion and mercy now go out to empty stomachs. You know how it is: as afternoon gives way to evening, the cry goes up: “What’s for dinner?” That crowd who came to Jesus was now hungry, and when people get hungry, they get *hangry*. That word is a combination of “hungry” and “angry,” and it pretty much sums up how we feel when we get hungry. We tend to get irritable and grouchy. We’re not at our best. **“Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves”** (Matthew 14:15b), the disciples said to Jesus. In other words, not our problem! Jesus’ response to his disciples must have floored them: **“They need not go away; you give them something to eat”** (Matthew 14:16). Huh? How in the world could they possibly feed all those people? Beyond the five loaves and two fish that were available, they saw only what they did not have. And that’s how it often is with us as well: we see only what we do not have. We worry about how we’ll get by. We become concerned that we won’t have enough. We fret over our limited resources, and we forget Jesus’ words: **“Bring them here to me”** (Matthew 14:18). Jesus invites us today, as he did his disciples then, to bring what we have to him, trusting that little is much in the hands of Jesus. Will we bring what we see only as small and insignificant to Jesus that he might bless them and us? Will we follow Jesus’ command so that he might do what seems impossible to us?

This Feeding of the 5000, as it is often called, is the one miracle of Jesus that is found in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). But as the closing verse in today’s

Gospel tells us, those who were fed through Jesus' multiplication of loaves and fish were many more than 5000: **"And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children"** (Matthew 14:21). That verse has always bothered me. According to custom, the women and children would stand or sit separate from the men. Still, why didn't the Gospel writers record who many people in total were there? Didn't the women and children matter? Or was it just because the men ate more? Getting an accurate headcount at a major event can prove challenging, whether on the National Mall or in the hills surrounding the Sea of Galilee. Regardless of how many people in total were fed, we are told that **"all ate and were satisfied"** (Matthew 14:20). Everyone had enough to eat; no one went away hungry. This points us to that beautiful verse from the Psalms that is part of the table blessing, found in Luther's *Small Catechism*: **"The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and You give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing"** (Psalm 145:15-16). We worship and serve a God of abundance, not a God of scarcity. Nothing is too hard for the Lord (Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27; Luke 1:37). And then comes the clean-up after feeding all those people! Good stewardship means that nothing goes to waste, and we see that after the meal is over **"... they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over"** (Matthew 14:20). Wow – twelve baskets of leftovers! But then again, 5000+ people had been fed. That's a lot of food. Little is much in the hands of Jesus.

If the Lord can feed 5000+ people with five loaves and two small fish, won't he provide for our needs today as well? We live in a time of great uncertainty right now. There are all kinds of scenarios out there that can make it hard to sleep at night. What are we to do? This is a call for each one of us, instead of fretting and worrying ourselves sick, to trust that the Lord will indeed provide. The Lord, whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8), invites us to put our trust and confidence in him. He may well choose to provide for us through means that we would never have imagined in our wildest dreams. And when we are called, like those first disciples, to do what seems unlikely, improbable, even impossible by human wisdom and worldly standards, we look to Jesus to do what is more than possible.

"You give them something to eat," Jesus told his disciples. Thanks be to God that Jesus provides not only food for the body, but food for the soul as well. Jesus is our Bread of life (John 6:22ff.), who died for us that we might live for him. God, who did not spare his own Son, but freely offered him up for us all, calls us to trust that he will do what we ask him in faith to do in the Lord's Prayer: **"Give us this day our daily bread"** (Matthew 6:11) – what we need for this day. When all is said and done, isn't that all that any of us has: this day? May our use of this day bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ who fed the 5000 and serve the needs of our neighbor in Christ's Name. Amen.