

Sermon for Proper 13a
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
Aug 2, 2020
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Genesis 32:22-31 Psalm 17:1-7, 16 Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:13-21

The feeding of the 5,000 story is in all 4 gospels; Matthew and Mark have an additional “feeding of the 4,000” story, so ... there must be something we are supposed to notice and learn! First, it is a miracle story.

The disciples have brought with them 5 loaves of bread and two fish, yet Jesus tells them to feed the vast crowd. “¹⁶Jesus said to them, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’” Jesus does not let us off the hook in being followers of Jesus. We are given the task of feeding people physically and spiritually, with the confidence that God will provide what we need, beyond whatever offering we bring. Maybe what we bring to Jesus today is something meager; in fear or anxiety we think we’d better hold on to what we have. We bring Jesus stale bread. Our prayer life has been sporadic, so we bring the one prayer we know, and tell ourselves that it is all that we have. We have almost nothing to bring to Jesus. I wonder if anyone else has ever felt that way....

Jesus’ response is one of my favorite lines: “You give them something to eat.” We stumble, stammer ... and have a very hard time relinquishing the knowledge that 5 loaves of bread and two small fish will not feed this crowd. What happens next is a miracle. Jesus gathers the people around him, tells them to sit down, and he prays. That is what looking up to heaven signifies: Jesus is talking to his Father: “thank you for this abundance.” Jesus blesses and breaks the loaves, gives them to the disciples, and the disciples give them to the crowds. The disciples, through Jesus, do feed the crowds of people. What a wonderful miracle; not only is everyone fed, but there is food left over! What do you hear in this story? (response) I am hearing to bring whatever we have to Jesus and allow Jesus to transform it. What we have, meager or abundant, is enough; we can (and need to) feed others.

This story is also a story of Eucharist, eufaristo, thanksgiving. Jesus gives thanks, blesses, breaks, and gives. Jesus’ life and our lives follow this pattern: we give thanks every day (right?); God blesses us – we are God’s beloved children! Jesus’ body was broken, and given to the world in resurrection life. We are a broken

people in many ways; we bring our brokenness to Jesus and he will give us new life. Bless ... break give. First is thanking God, inviting God into our offerings.

This call on our lives is powerful. What does it mean in our lives today? We thank God in everything and for everything.

Thank you, God, for being alive at this time and in this place. Ask a question: God, who would you have me feed today? What sort of food do they need? Soup? Bread? The word of God?

Discern your role in God's will for you every day. Every day! Say thank you for being brought to a new day; say thank you at day's end.

It is hard to be thankful these days. As we enter the fifth month of pandemic life, it feels like the ground beneath us is shifting. There are new rules, new riots, more death, more theories, more – chaos – every day. Giving thanks in all things helps ground ourselves, not on dirt, or pavement, but in Jesus Christ. Give thanks for life. Give thanks for friends, family, strawberries, ... and for Jesus gathering us to him so that he can feed us. Ground yourself in Jesus.

Of the many lessons that we can learn from Jacob wrestling with “a man” (God?) all night long. Jacob does not emerge unscathed, but with a painful limp. What is our message? Wrestle with God. Wrestle with God, when, as for Jacob, all you have left is God; that is a difficult, wonderful place to be. Jacob brings all of himself: the one who cheated his brother out of his birthright, cheated his brother out of their father's blessing, ... who is now on his way to reconcile with his brother Esau. Jacob has the courage not only to wrestle with God but to ask for God's blessing. God blesses Jacob, gives him a new name for the rest of his life. God's blessings do not come with a life of ease, but with the knowledge that God cares enough to stay with us all night, all day, for as long as we need. We will be changed. And if all we brought to the wrestling match was a life of being a scoundrel, we, too, are not too far away from God to receive God's blessing.

Right now, and going forward:

Bring all that you have to Jesus.

Feed people.

Bring to God all of your worries and fears. Wrestle if you must.

Be confident that God is near, that life will leave each of us with our own limp and bruises,

And that miracles happen every day. Watch for them, seek them, then live into those miracles.

Be thankful that we have been fed; and, so nourished, we are equipped to go out and spread those miracles into the world.