

Peace Lutheran Church

Great Falls, MT

9 Pentecost A 2020

Matthew 14:13-21

A Day With The One Who Gives Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Loaves of bread and schools of fish are commonly found in artforms of the Early Christian Church. Jesus' teaching and miracles using these common earthly elements obviously made a lasting impact on the Church in its infancy. The use of loaves and fish didn't just pop out of thin air. These things were significant for the church of the Old Testament too. In Exodus, God fed Israel with the manna gathered each morning in the wilderness. The prophets also give us a vivid picture of Messianic banquet spread in anticipation of the end of the age. And we dare not forget the annual Passover festival with its unleavened bread which points us to Jesus as the Bread of life given us in His holy Supper.

Fish was a staple of Palestine then as it remains to this day. It was not by accident that Jesus called fishermen to be His disciples. Fishing in Middle Eastern culture is comparable to wheat farming in our own. It's not surprising to us that the Church used the ichthus as a common symbol of the Christian faith. For us who live in Montana as fish out of water, the fish symbol is out of place and doesn't have the same significance it might have for Christians living on the coastlands or beside the Great Lakes. We might have chosen a more locally recognizable symbol. Nevertheless, fish and bread still make a great shore lunch even for us.

You and I have all kinds of food at our fingertips in America. With so many choices appealing to our palates, we scarcely realize how central bread was to the life of the people living in Biblical times. Bread was a part of every meal in Palestinian culture whether you were a Jew or Greek. No bread, no meal. Spanning the cultural divide of rich and poor alike, the wonder of bread was and still remains the vital link to table fellowship.

The boat was intended to be a get away vehicle for Jesus to escape the crowds, but some 5,000 men along with the women and children who went with them didn't get the hint. The Sea of Galilee was a body of water teeming with fish and served as a natural illustration for preaching and teaching. Along these illustrious shores, Jesus displays His great power and tender compassion by meeting the immediate needs of a hungry and tired people. With a boy's little lunch, the Lord who gives us this day our daily bread multiplies and distributes a large scale miracle—a variable feast. He fills the hungry with good things. What a remarkable

thing—almost beyond belief unless we approach the text by faith and know it to be true. The people were hungry, so Jesus feeds them. Nice story. A very nice gesture on Jesus' part to pick up the tab. Yet those who ate to the point of satisfaction became hungry again. Daily bread must be given thanks for daily.

What are we missing here? What's really the point of the miracle? First, we come to recognize in Jesus a Man who is moved by compassion for sinners. Looking out amongst the multitude He sees a people hungry, a people looking to Him for satisfaction in life. Though intending to leave them with a boat ride, the people pursue Him. Notice how the multitude was just as determined to be with Jesus as the His disciples were to be alone with Him. What Jesus had delivered to them by way of words and teaching manifested itself in their willingness to follow Him. Drawn to hear more and see more of the Bread of life, these common people weren't ready to go home and call it a day. In faith, they made their way around by foot along the shore. In faith they trusted Jesus to provide them with manna from above in the gift of Himself for them.

Second, we come to recognize in Jesus a Savior who gives both words of life and physical bread and fish. The two go together in much the same way bread belongs to the body of Christ in the sacred Supper, and blood is consumed in, with, and under the wine of the cup. It is not enough for Jesus to offer them some promise of future blessing and future satisfaction for their present hunger. He gives them what they need right now—in this place and in this time. Your communion with Jesus isn't some nice symbol of a future reality reserved in the distant future. His body and His blood assures you of forgiveness NOW. His table fellowship with you is a present reality even though He remains hidden in these physical elements.

Word belongs along side the Sacrament. Sacrament is given as the Word is received. We see in this feeding of the multitude a foreshadowing of Christ feeding His Church with the daily bread of a miraculous Supper. It is a divine meal we eat and drink as men, women, and children of His New Testament multitude. And it's not restricted to a mere 5,000 any more than the Gospel can only be proclaimed to a mere finite number determined by a restrictive governor. The Lord unites us as people of faith here in this place with fellow Christians all over the world in and through Holy Communion. The bread and fish Jesus multiplied and the disciples distributed was given for all to eat, not just a select few. This teaches us that we all need Jesus. We all need the Bread of life each day, otherwise we are sure to perish. Word and Sacraments keep us from dying in this world. We joy to receive them with thanksgiving.

Third, we recognize in Jesus One who is always with us no matter what time of night or day. "Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and 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’” (Matthew 14:15, 16a). The disciples are typical of today’s pastors in that the stresses of ministry spread over physical limitations of time and multiplied by the number of people to serve are often overwhelming. The disciples’ solution is to send the crowds away so that they can fend for themselves in the towns and villages. But Jesus in His ever-ready battery mode is ready and able to serve no matter the time or place. Physical limitations are no encumbrance to Him!

While the disciples suggest a human solution to a human problem, Jesus forces these pastors to think in divine terms. “You give them something to eat,” is Jesus’ way of getting them to think beyond the present dilemma. They stand dumbfounded by His directive. In their near future, they will indeed give these hungry something to eat in the holy ministry they will assume. Their office is one where hungry souls are always in need of feeding with Word and Sacraments. Pastors have limitations, but the work they do reminds us all that Jesus is with us always even to the end of the age. He is with us whether in desolate places or among hoards of people. He is with us whether it is a 5:30 a.m. wake up or an evening bedtime. Jesus is a 24/7 kind of Savior and King who is always ready and always willing to meet our needs through daily bread.

The fact that these daily realities of fish and bread were made holy by Jesus and took on divine significance directly impacted the Early Church. These symbols made their way into art-forms that remain with us to this day. In a day and age when statuary are being pulled down and destroyed all over the nation, we have in these lasting signs a foretaste of our feast to come. Jesus desires to remain with you and His real presence in bread and wine truly give us the forgiveness of our sins. For us and for our salvation we are blessed today to be with the One who gives us this day our daily bread. Amen.

Now may the peace that passes all understanding guard and keep us in the true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.