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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Proper 11, Series B  
Saturday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Sunday, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Sermon: “*You Give Them Something to Eat!*”

Texts: Mark 6:30-44

Focus: God gives us all that we need in abundance.

Function: That they would share with others to help those in need.

Structure: Story-Interrupted

Locus: “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need” (SC, 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

In today’s Gospel lesson, we have our annual encounter with Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5,000. In actuality, it was more than 5,000, as Matthew tells us: “And those who ate were five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matt. 14:21, ESV).<sup>1</sup> Last time I checked, women and children are considered people too, so I prefer to call this the feeding of the five thousand *plus* (5,000+)! Yet, regardless of what you call it, this is the only one of Jesus’ miracles recorded in *all four* gospels. Some occur in one or two or three of the canonical gospels, but only this miraculous feeding shows up in all four.<sup>2</sup> So there must be something to that—an added importance about *this* miracle that God is trying to highlight for us.

The story begins with the apostles returning from their preaching and healing ministry in Galilee (cf. Mark 6:7-13). They had announced the coming kingdom of God, driven out demons, and healed the sick. Now they were tired and needed rest.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> I realize, of course, that the resurrection occurs in all four gospels as well. However, that was a miracle done *to* Jesus (Acts 2:24; 10:40; 13:30; 10:9), whereas the miraculous feeding is a miracle done *by* Jesus.

“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while,” Jesus said (Mark 6:31). They didn’t even have enough time to eat. Every pastor has days like those, when you’re so busy that you forget to eat lunch. Then suddenly you’re called out on a hospital visit, and you find yourself either eating a granola bar in the car or waiting in the drive-thru lane, depending on how dire the situation. Jesus famously said that man does not live on bread alone, and yet you still gotta eat!

So at Jesus’ urging, they got into the boat and sailed across the lake, the Sea of Galilee, to a deserted spot. Unfortunately, the crowds recognized Jesus’ boat, and when they caught wind of his destination, they hurried ahead on foot. When Jesus and the apostles got ashore, a great crowd awaited them. So much for getting away!

Yet, when Jesus saw them, “he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). Jesus had *compassion* on the crowd. The Greek verb here literally means to “feel it in your kidneys.” It means that Jesus experienced deep, gut-wrenching pity for the huddled masses before him. It’s a powerful word—one used in the New Testament only of Jesus or characters in parables who represent Jesus (e.g., the Good Samaritan, the king in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, and the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son). This kind of pity means more than just feeling sorry for someone. It is the divine compassion for hurting people that only Jesus feels in his heart. And what’s more, this compassion always moves Jesus to *do something*.

They were like sheep without a shepherd, so Jesus had compassion on them and began to teach them the Word. Our Old Testament reading and Psalm today show us how necessary it is

to have a shepherd in your life. As my friend, Pastor Robert Harmon, says: “What do you call sheep without a shepherd? *Lunch!*”

Yet as the day dragged on, and the sun began to set beyond the western shore, the disciples, whose own stomachs were still grumbling loudly, were ready to call it a day. They asked Jesus to dismiss the crowds so they could go home or find food in neighboring villages. The disciples didn't want to have to deal with these people. They just wanted them to move along. They wanted to make the problem somebody else's.

The attitude of the disciples reminds me of how many of us respond to the poor and needy when we encounter them. It's all too easy for us to ignore the man on the corner with a cardboard sign that reads ANYTHING HELPS. We turn away in disgust (and with just a little bit of guilt) and try to assuage our troubled consciences by saying, “He'll just spend it on booze anyway.” Or a young Mexican couple comes to the church in need of food and a motel to stay the night. We don't want to deal with it. Besides, they might be “illegals.” Serves 'em right! So we just refer them to the Task Force and offer them whatever bag of chips or cookies Pastor happens to have on hand in his snack stash. Just move along! Go somewhere else. Don't bother me. After all, isn't that why we have food banks and welfare programs? Let them go *there*, if they need help.

Such a response reminds me of Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's classic tale, *A Christmas Carol*. When some charitable chaps show up at Scrooge's counting house on Christmas Eve to take up a collection for the poor, he responds: “Are there no prisons? ... And the Union workhouses... Are they still in operation?” As if we should scoop up all the poor and

put them in prisons. Then they can have three square meals a day and make license plates for a living. I pay my taxes, so I've already done my part. Now leave me alone and move along.

“Many can't go there,” the men reply, “and many would rather die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

But Jesus will have none of those arguments or justifications for our selfishness or convenience. “*You* give them something to eat,” he says to the disciples—and to us. You give them something to eat. Jesus is not interested in referrals. He desires mercy and kindness. He calls us to *do* something to help the poor. *You* give them something to eat.

This is the great inconvenience of being a Christian: Jesus does not let us off the hook from helping the poor and needy. Even after paying our taxes and our tithes, we are still called to help the person in front of us right here, right now.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “*When* you give to the needy”—not “if” (Matt. 6:2). The Bible tells us to “remember the poor” (Gal. 6:10). And the Apostle Paul writes, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Eph. 4:28). The expectation, of course, is that we must share part of the fruit of our labor with others. And Jesus' brother, James, writes in his famous section on faith and works:

“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas. 2:15-17).

Faith without works is dead. That is why Martin Luther's explanation of the Fifth Commandment against murder includes a positive exhortation also: "We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need" (SC, 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment). This is not merely Pastor Chris's opinion. This is the Biblical teaching and our Lutheran confession of faith.

Robbed of their excuses, the disciples resort to sass. "We don't have enough money to buy enough bread to feed all these people—and where would we get it, anyway?" (cp. V. 37).

So Jesus asks them to bring what little they have: five loaves of bread and two fish. By the way, I cannot help but wonder if there is a symbolic importance to these numbers. After all,  $5 + 2 = 7$ . And seven is the Hebrew number of completion. What the disciples regard only as a measly meal (presumably intended for their own consumption), is actually quite perfect in God's eyes. It's just enough. For, as we shall see, God can take what little we have, bless it, multiply it, and supply us in abundance. As we prayed in the psalm, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1).

Jesus commands the crowds to sit down "on the green grass" (v. 39) beside the Sea of Galilee. Once again, the miracle conjures up word pictures from the Shepherd Psalm: "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters" (Ps. 23:2).

"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" (Mark 6:41). Notice the verbs Mark employs in verse 41: take, bless, break, and give. They are the same four verbs used at the Last Supper in Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper: "And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and

gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body’” (Mark 14:22). Did you hear that? The same four verbs: take, bless, break, and give.

Now I am not suggesting that Jesus was serving the Lord’s Supper at the feeding of the five thousand plus. He wasn’t. He simply served a meal. Yet, as Alfred Edersheim points out, we cannot help but recall the Lord’s Supper, his Holy Communion, when we hear those four verbs strung along together like lovely pearls on the string of a necklace. Wondrous things—miraculous things—happen when Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it back to us. He can feed a whole crowd of people, or he can turn them into his very body for us to eat for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Matt. 26:26). How wonderful indeed!

Jesus had told the disciples to feed the crowd. “*You* give something to eat.” But they didn’t have enough (from their perspective, at least). But Jesus took what little they had, blessed it, and multiplied the loaves and fishes in abundance, giving them *back to the disciples* for distribution. In other words, they didn’t want to feed the crowd, and they didn’t know *how* to feed the crowd. But Jesus supplied their lack. “And they all ate and were satisfied” (v. 42). In fact, they gathered twelve baskets full of leftovers. They ended up with more food than they started with.

God takes care of us and provides for our needs. “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Ps. 144:15-16). He feeds the sparrows that do not have barns to gather a crop, and he clothes the lilies of the field. He gives us daily bread, as we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer. As Martin Luther writes, “He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body

and life” (SC, 1<sup>st</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed). And he gives us abundance so that we can share with others—so *we* can give them something to eat.

Yet God also provides for our greatest need of all: the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, our Lord. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son...” (John 3:16a, KJV). Jesus is the “true bread from heaven” (John 6:32). His flesh is true food, and his blood is true drink (John 6:55). And “whoever feeds on this bread will live forever” (John 6:58).

It is unfortunate that we do not have the Lord’s Supper today. It would be wonderful to feast on the Lord’s Body and Blood—the most miraculous feeding of all. Then we could truly, “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8). So we will wait until *next* Sunday, when the crucified and risen Lord Jesus will once again take, bless, break, and give us bread to eat. Then we shall all eat and be satisfied (cf. Mark 6:42). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.