

**Aug. 2, 2020
Christ the Servant, Reston
Pentecost 9
Matthew 14:13-21**

Nobody could blame the disciples for their concern. It had been a long and exhausting day. People from all over the countryside had followed Jesus with their aches and pains. Rather than retreat or rest, the gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus provided healing for all of them, one at a time.

Meanwhile, his twelve followers were overwhelmed by the need. It was getting late, and all they could see was a long line of needy people who would not go away. “Lord,” they said, “there isn’t enough food to go around. Send these people away so they can get something to eat.”

Well, here’s a story we can understand. The needs of the world are overwhelming. What can we do? Where would we start? A third of the world’s people are starving for food. About 690 million people worldwide go to bed hungry each night. An estimated 14 million children under the age of five worldwide suffer from severe malnutrition, yet only 25% of those have access to treatment and food that could save their lives. The needs are so great. It seems like we have so little. How could five loaves and two fish feed 5,000 people? We are not surprised to hear the disciples say, “Lord, send them away.”

According to the gospel of Matthew Jesus did not take his disciples’ advice. Now, we normally think of this story as one about Jesus. But it is also a story about his twelve disciples. When the twelve said, “Lord, get rid of this crowd,” Jesus replied, “*You* give them something to eat!” Now that’s a striking aspect to this story. Jesus did not turn stones into loaves of bread to feed the crowd. Instead, he demanded his followers pitch in and give what they had. There is no mention of a young boy who offered his lunch; that’s the gospel of John. This is Matthew, and in Matthew, Jesus said, “*You* give them something to eat.”

They responded, “All we have are five loaves and a couple of fish.” So he asked them for it. They gave Jesus all the food they had. Jesus gave thanks to God for the little bit of food. He broke the bread. And then he gave back the bread in order for them to give it away to others. And after all 5,000 people had eaten all they could the disciples took up 12 baskets of leftovers.

Do you remember last week when I said that when you find the one strange thing in each parable Jesus told, you have found a key to the kingdom of God? What’s strange about this story of the feeding of the 5,000? Well, the obvious. Five loaves and two fish feed 5,000 people with some to spare. You might say, “That’s not so strange. Jesus did a miracle.” Well, maybe that’s not the thing to take away from this. It doesn’t say that Jesus said the Aramaic form of “abracadabra.” It doesn’t say that he waved a stick like Moses getting water out of a rock at Meribah. It only says that, when Jesus asked other people to feed the hungry, the hungry were fed.

We see the story as a miracle when we need to see it as a metaphor. When Jesus gave the feeding responsibility to the disciples, the impossible suddenly became possible. “*YOU* give them something to eat,” he said to them. How did the food multiply? That’s not the point. It just did. If we see the story as a metaphor rather than a miracle then we can understand that when *we* follow our Lord’s command and turn *our* attention to feeding the world’s hungry the unexpected can happen.

Truth be told, I imagine the disciples didn’t want to give away what they had because they were afraid they would not have enough for themselves. Heck, they *didn’t* even have enough for themselves. Five loaves and two fish for twelve people? So they held back out of fear. “Send them away, Jesus.” But Jesus asked and they gave him all they had. After Jesus thanked God, he broke what they had given him, and said, “Now, give it away.” They could no longer hold them, hoard them, keep them, preserve them, or protect them. Everybody could be fed.

I think we are that way about our own resources. We're so afraid there isn't going to be enough money or resources or whatever it is to go around. So we start stockpiling it. We don't want to share because we are afraid we won't have enough. Or worse, we use somebody *else's* share. You've heard the statistics: The United States has only 5.6% of the world's population. Yet we consume a third of the world's natural resources. If our gospel writer Matthew were telling the story about the United States, it would be as if the disciples went out into the 5000 people and got food for themselves – and more than they could eat!

What is it that makes us want to keep our own personal loaves of bread, our own fish? Is it because the need is so great and our individual resources are so small? Maybe. But I'm wondering if the sin we need to confess is that we hold back because we don't think there will be enough for us. An interesting book title has arisen: "Too Much and Not Enough." Don't worry; I won't dwell on the subject of the book. But, I thought the title aptly described the mindset of the traditional privileged American. Most likely, it describes me. We already have *way* more than we need, but somehow it is never enough. We always need more. Too much and not enough.

Like the disciples, we get intimidated by the enormity of the task. A big part of it has to do with global warming and droughts. Much of the hunger occurs in or near a war zone. How to address war? A lion's share of it has to do with poverty. So, now Pastor, you are asking me to solve global warming, war, and poverty. Sure looks to me like twelve disciples facing down 5,000 people!

Well, there are some things we can respond to the big picture. Vote for people who actually take global warming science seriously and have a plan to address it. Fight for peace and start by being peaceful people. Give money to Lutheran Hunger and Lutheran World Relief.

But maybe the most helpful way we can feed the 5,000 would be locally. We had a good feeding ministry going at CTS. We were feeding Fellowship House.

We were feeding N. Street Village. We were feeding the homeless on Tuesdays. Even our own food bank is closed down and the food donated to Cornerstones. All that is on hold now. But the pandemic has actually *increased* food insecurity in our area. Let me tell you about one way we can directly feed the need right here in Reston.

Before the pandemic the Food Pantry at South Lakes High School was serving over 200 families per week. Right here in Reston. Food insecurity. Since the pandemic the need has become greater. The Food Pantry at South Lakes High School is currently providing grab and go breakfasts and lunches along with bags of prepare-at-home food. They are currently serving over 120 families and that statistic is growing by 20 to 25 per week.

Recipients are getting staples, produce, and meat. They alternate weeks in giving out such things as cookbooks, laundry detergents, toiletries, and baking supplies. One mother said that bringing the groceries home was the highlight of her kids' week. They unpack the bags and put each item in the pantry.

Food cannot be taken to the high school. A couple in our congregation has agreed to be a drop-off point if any of you would like to donate food. Steve and Michelle Moyer will put a box outside their garage for donations which they, in turn, will deliver. You will receive an e-mail Monday with Steve and Michelle's address. We will also post it online. But this is one way we can get back into the "S" part of our name – Christ the "S"ervant – and the "S" part of our mission statement: Celebrate, Thing, "S"erve!

Let's not think that the CTS food pantry has closed down. Let's think that it has just moved to the Moyers. One of our families may drive by the Moyer's and drop five loaves into the box. Another may drop in two fish (canned, preferably!). Pretty soon, a multitude has been fed. Jesus said, "They need not go away. *YOU* give them something to eat."