

The Lord Feeds Us

Fellow disciples of the Savior,

Our Gospel today is very familiar—the feeding of the 5000 is recorded in all four Gospels. It's a vivid story—the huge crowd, their stomachs grumbling, and all the disciples can find is a few loaves and fish. But at the same time, this account can seem pretty foreign. We get sick and then pray for healing; so when Jesus heals someone, that is miraculous, but at least it's something we have prayed for. But multiplying food? In our society at least, that's probably not a need that we regularly feel—not with the abundance around us.

But today we'll see how much this lesson says to us. To help, I'd like to draw some applications to two young men. One is Cameron—who was baptized into God's family this morning. The other is Collin—our new vicar. Actually, we'll see that this lesson applies to every one of us; for Jesus feeds us—not only physically, but especially spiritually; and then Jesus uses us to feed others.

This section starts out with a crowd following Jesus; and Jesus then healed the sick among them. Matthew says that Jesus **“had compassion on them.”** Jesus felt their need, deep inside. The Almighty God feels it when we are hurting; and he loves us and helps us.

There's more here. Matthew began, **“When Jesus heard what had happened.”** What had happened? John the Baptist had been put in prison and then killed. Why? For preaching that people needed to repent of their sins, then baptizing them and pointing them to Jesus. Imagine how Jesus must have felt about that—John, the great prophet, was brutally murdered for serving the Lord.

Jesus overcame his grief, and taught and healed the people in need. I imagine that John's death added urgency to Jesus' work—he saw how the evil world was rejecting his love; and he was driven all the more to show that love day after day.

The crowds came to hear Jesus—to hear him talk about God's love for the lowliest person, about God's forgiveness of the worst of sinners, about the need for each of them to repent and believe the Good News. In this way, Jesus was feeding their souls, meeting their deepest need.

Yet they also had a physical need. The disciples pointed out that it was a remote place, it was getting late, the people were hungry. Their solution: send the people away—they could go home or to a village where they could buy supper. This was a crowd of 5000 men plus some women and children; there was no chance of feeding the crowd out there.

All they could find were five loaves of bread and two fish. Yet Jesus fed the crowd with that. **“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.”**

Most everyone in Ohio and Michigan is sad. On top of all the other things we're dealing with, the Big 10 season has been postponed. Some of you have gone to a college football game. Imagine tens of thousands of people crowded in a stadium, sitting through a game. Now pretend

it's halftime, and they announce that the food at the concession stands is free—you can eat all you want! Imagine how much food a crowd that size would consume!

Feeding that crowd with a few fish and loaves was impossible. Yet it was no problem for Jesus. He simply said a prayer of thanks, and broke the food into pieces—enough that they ended up with much more than they started with.

And Jesus did this purely out of his grace. He didn't owe them anything. He loved them. So he used his power to feed them.

Remember that as you face challenges in life, like this coronavirus. Our God is strong. He can do the impossible. And he loves us and does take care of us.

But, we say, we can't see that! Well, step back into that crowd. Why didn't Jesus just provide food at the start, before anyone got hungry? For that matter, what about all those people he healed—why did he let them get sick in the first place?

God allows trials in our lives to bring us closer to him, to build up our faith. When we are hurting, we remember how he healed people, how he fed the crowds, and how he has taken care of us to this point; and we can trust that he is working for our good. As we heard in our Lesson from Romans, Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. As we sang in our hymn, "All is well because of God's great love."

And not just physically well; he makes us spiritually well. Jesus takes us when we are starving spiritually and he invites us to feast on the finest foods, all for free as Isaiah told us. He feeds us with hope in the face of any danger. When our sins are dragging us down to despair, we know that his death paid for every sin and his resurrection won our victory. When we are in danger of not starving but in danger of hell, Jesus assures us that heaven is our home.

This morning Jesus did all this for young Cameron. In baptism Jesus washed his sins away. Jesus gave this child a new identity—he is a child of God. Jesus gave him strength to face whatever challenges will arise in the years to come.

All by his grace, Jesus in his power feeds us. And then Jesus uses us as his servants to feed other people.

In our lesson, the disciples had said, **"Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy some food."** And **"Jesus replied, They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."** Why would Jesus say that? Did he think the disciples could scrounge up enough lunches to keep the crowd quiet?

No. Jesus knew they couldn't feed the crowd.

He wanted his disciples to recognize that. When the crowd was fed, it was all Jesus' doing. It was his power. And it was his grace at work.

But notice that he used the disciples in his work. After giving thanks, he **"broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people."** These mere men, these sinful men, were feeding the people! But it was only by Jesus' power.

Our vicar comes fresh from the Seminary, where he is studying the Bible in a lot of detail. In dogmatics class he is studying topics like, What is the cause of our salvation?

The Bible says that, first of all, God is the cause. We sinners can't save ourselves. It is only by his power. And why does God save us? Purely because of his grace. God is driven to save us because he is love.

But after we recognize that God is the first cause of our salvation, Scripture tells us that God uses an instrument—the Gospel in his Word and Sacrament. “Faith comes from hearing the message...of Christ.” “Baptism now saves you”—that is what the Bible says. We call this the “instrumental cause” of our salvation—God uses the Gospel as his tool to keep us in the true faith.

Yet there is one more part to our being saved. Paul wrote, “How can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Isaiah said, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” God uses his servants to bring the Gospel that creates faith.

We call this the “ministerial cause” of salvation. “Minister” means servant. And every Christian is a servant of God. The Lord uses us, every one of us, to spread his love and speak his Word to those he saves.

In our Gospel, Jesus used his twelve disciples to feed the people; but he made it clear that he was the one who was doing the work. The same is true today.

We are installing our vicar. God willing, he will preach, he will teach adults and little children; he will talk to people in our community—we aren’t going to go canvassing right now, but we’ll look for other ways to spread the Word.

God will bless his efforts. He may even get to see that—a person’s faith deepened; someone’s fears stilled. But whatever “success” there may be, it is all God’s doing. Every good thing is accomplished by God’s power.

This is not only true for vicars and pastors. It’s not just teachers and elders. All Christians are called to be God’s servants—to be his hands and his voice.

God might use you to distribute food to the hungry. God can use you as you work hard at your job and he accomplishes good things through that. When you stop and call someone who could use some encouraging, God will work through your words. When you read a Bible story to a child, or talk to a neighbor about Christ—the Holy Spirit will work in what you say.

God works through all of us.

We’ll have to see how the Lord works through young Cameron in the years to come—at home, at school, in his career. Maybe some day he’ll get to be a vicar. Or whatever he does, God will use him to build his kingdom. As God uses every one of us.

The Lord feeds us with his Word of truth, and then he uses us to feed others with that Bread of life. Amen.