

Sermon 9th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13), Yr.A @ St Johns – 2/8/20
“Jesus multiplies the little we give Him” Matthew 14:13-21 (Isaiah 55:1-3)
- Pastor André Meyer

Pray: Heavenly Father, by your Spirit, bless this time in your Word today, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Imagine you are sitting down and the table is set and you are about to eat your favourite meal. *What* would it be? For me, a man of simple pleasures, I imagine a simple Sunday roast – beef, lamb or chicken – *whatever!* Juicy and tender, and, the smell of it cooking in the oven for the last few hours has been permeating the air and making me salivate. Roast potatoes, fresh beans, peas, carrots and other veggies, perhaps some crackling, and, of course, a boat of gravy ready to overflow upon the plate... and a glass of something good poured and *red-dy (ready)*. If I’m especially blessed, there’s perhaps a Yorkshire Pudding waiting to be devoured as well! *Yum!* 😊 *That* would be satisfying! ...But, before the meal begins a blessing is asked and thanksgiving is given to the Lord for His gracious provision. So, what’s your favourite meal that satisfies you? What’s on *your* plate, in your bowl, or your glass? What blessings would you enjoy and give thanks to the Lord for receiving?

Today we hear of the only miracle of Jesus mentioned in all four Gospel accounts (other than the resurrection) – the feeding of the 5,000. We begin with Jesus hearing the news of the death of His cousin, John the Baptist, at the hands of Herod Antipas. Jesus is not unaffected by death, and He seeks to withdraw and reflect privately with His disciples and His Heavenly Father on what has happened. So, they go off by boat to find a solitary place. Luke mentions they headed to Bethsaida on the north east shore of the lake or Sea of Galilee (Lk. 9:10).

Although, as it happens with Jesus, wherever He goes the crowds tend to follow. Seeing Jesus in the boat on the Sea of Galilee means they can follow Him on shore by foot and see where He will end up. Sure enough, when He came ashore the crowd caught up with Him, but seeing them all, Jesus had compassion on them and began to heal the sick among them.

“But,” you ask, *“how are there so many people?”* We hear there were about 5,000 men, *not including* women and children (v.21), so, perhaps 7-8,000 were there. Although, the nearby villages of Capernaum and Bethsaida would’ve had no more than 2 or 3,000 in total. ...Well, the other accounts give us clues. Matthew tells us that as the grass was green, it was likely Spring time, and John reports that Passover was not far away (Jn. 6:4). The crowd was so large because it was likely made up of pilgrims from Galilee making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the three great annual Jewish festivals, such as Passover (Ex. 23:14,17). Caravans of pilgrims would gather in the villages and towns of Galilee, transforming them overnight into a city of tents. Combined with this, Jesus had been teaching of the Kingdom of God and His fame was spreading widely in the region.

As such, while nearby, on the northern shores of the lake, the pilgrims naturally wanted to see and hear the famous prophet Jesus, for themselves. It is quite plausible that by the end of the day, the crowd numbered in the thousands – like a small army, of curious pilgrims and locals, all wanting to hear from Jesus. Perhaps they had heard of John’s death too and wanted to know how He would respond and what He would do or say.

After many hours of Jesus healing the sick, the disciples noticed the day was waning, and their empty tummies likely drove them to say something. How could so many find food and shelter so late in the day if they didn’t leave soon? Perhaps *some* might just get to a nearby village to buy food, while many others may not get fed at all. Such is the life of a pilgrim on the road. So the disciples shared their concerns on crowd’s behalf.

Surprisingly, Jesus replied, *“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat”* (v.16). *“...What? Is He joking with us? What have we got? Any of you got any food? ...Okay. We have only five loaves of barley bread and two dried fish. How can this feed so many?”* they answered.

It wasn't going to be a banquet feast at all with *barely enough* to feed *two* grown men! Now, the five loaves they had, are not the comparably large loaves of bread we're used to today. Rather, these unleavened loaves of barley bread were more like small, flat pieces of pita bread. The coarse barley bread was less expensive than wheat flour bread, and it was a staple subsistence food for the poor, and the pilgrim alike. The two fish were likely dried sardines from fisheries in Magdala across the lake. Those living near the Sea of Galilee relied on bread and fish as staples of their diet. No, with so little, of little substance, it wasn't going to be a banquet feast for *anyone* at all!

How often do we look at 'the little' we feel we have when it comes to our lives? Likely, we have nearly *everything* we need living in Australia, but still we feel somehow 'unsatisfied.' Somehow we may feel that we don't have enough – or at least enough of what we should have, even as believers, to feel 'satisfied' before God. What do we lack in our lives that makes us feel this way? Even with the good things we have, with incomes, our bellies full, with our health mostly intact, with clothes, a roof over our heads and a bed to sleep in, *and*, our extra toys, gadgets and appliances... *still*, there are times when we feel unsatisfied... or 'incomplete.' Even with so many blessings, we may feel we lack something in our lives... How can we 'feed the multitudes' when we ourselves feel we have so little to give?

And 'yes,' there are also other days when we are a little *too* self-sufficient to have any need for God. *We are too* rich or a little *too* comfortable to have much need for Him at times, aren't we? We all know it. But more often than not, we still find ourselves dissatisfied with life. All of us *are* spiritually hungry because of sin, but we do not always go to the right places for the spiritual food we truly need.

At other times, we come back to Jesus with the sheer impossibility of some of the tasks He seems to ask of us, and say, *“I can't do what you ask of me!” “I can't make myself better!” “I can't always love others as you want me to!” “I can't do this ministry on my own!” “I can't bear this cross!” “I can't always be patient with those who are difficult to deal with!” “I can't fix this relationship; I keep stuffing it up!” “I can't bring my family or friends to worship!” “I can't forgive that person.” “I can't pray or read my Bible as I should every day!” “I can't be an evangelist!” “I can't feed the world's hungry!” “I can't wait patiently for the future, or for a solution to my problems.”* Whatever it is that troubles us, if we are wise, *we will* be blessed to go with them to Jesus.

Sometimes we might even doubt He can do anything about our problems. *“Maybe Jesus can't help me when I bring Him what I have.” “...We only have five loaves of bread, and two fish, Jesus. How can we feed so many with this?”* the Disciples asked. *“...Bring them here to me,”* said Jesus.

But once we submit our cares to Him, Jesus *can* do something. And He does with the little we have to bring Him. Jesus says, *“Bring them here to me. Bring me the little you do have.”*

He then tells the crowd to be seated on the grass; to be ready, and patient – not anxious, or worried, but to trust Him in faith to provide. It's like the scene of a Shepherd as He provides for His sheep. Jesus takes the little offering that's given to the Father for us. He gave thanks to His Father for what is given. Then He divided it, and gave what He had to the disciples... and the disciples gave it to the people... and it multiplied. It multiplied, and multiplied, so much that all who had need that afternoon were filled. They all ate and we hear they were *satisfied*... satisfied by *a staple food* like barley bread and dried fish!! and twelve baskets full of left overs were gathered up after all was said and done.

So too, we can trust Jesus to use the little we have to give to Him so that He will multiply it to provide for us and for many others as well. We don't have to be filled 'to the brim' with all sorts of things to be satisfied, do we? Just enough will be enough.

Jesus invites us to bring our problems, our burdens and our sins to Him so that He can forgive us, provide for what we need, and heal our hearts through the power of His love for us. By His little sacrificial act of dying for our sins upon the Cross, Jesus multiplies the blessings of God's grace and forgiveness so that all may be saved from sin and receive the blessings of eternal life!

And Jesus calls us to bring our gifts and talents to Him as well – be they large or small. And, when we place them into His hands, when we entrust them to Him, He always multiplies their usefulness and blesses people through His Church as well. When we bring our gifts to God He uses them to build His Church and to grow us in love together. And, of course, there's also that banquet feast in His Kingdom yet to come that gives us hope!

It means that we can *always* bring the little we have to Jesus and He will use it and bless it nonetheless, to be used for His glory and our good. When we give what we have to God – be they problems or gifts, He takes them, blesses them, and does more with them than we could ever imagine. Even though we may think that we do not have very much, a little becomes a lot as it is placed into the hands of our loving and gracious Lord – yes, even us. Amen.