Feed the World – World Communion Sunday

Matthew 14:13-21 Kimby Young

Matthew 15:32-39 October 6, 2024

Isaiah 58:6-12

The two scripture passages for today from Matthew are very similar stories – two occasions when Jesus fed a multitude of people with limited resources. Other than the resurrection of Jesus, this miracle story is the only miracle that appears in all four gospels. I find that fascinating.

What is so important about this miracle story that all four gospel writers thought it worthy enough to record? And further, that Matthew included two different incidents of such a similar miracle. From Matthew’s perspective, I think he was saying this is so important that Jesus did it more than once - maybe even more than the two times recorded in the gospel.

Jesus performed this miracle of breaking bread several times – so that his disciples would notice and maybe get the point. What is it about breaking loaves and sharing food that is so important?

For one reason, this miracle answers basic human need – hunger. Jesus satisfies hunger. Jesus satisfies basic elemental natural universal fundamental human need. That is what this story tells us. We all feel hunger. We all need to eat. This story reminds us and promises us, in and through Jesus Christ, God will always feed us. God will always supply our needs. God will always provide for us. God will always nurture us. God will always sustain us. God will always, always give us whatever is best for us. And there will always be more than enough. Even beyond this concrete reality of hunger, bread is symbolic of so much more. Bread represents all that sustains us, all that nourishes us, all that we need to live full and fruitful lives. Bread is a universal element. So when we pray, “give us this day our daily bread” – we are saying more than “feed me lunch.” We are saying, nourish my body and my spirit. Help me to grow strong and to remain healthy. Collectively help us to feed one another and receive all that we need to be our best. Bread is life and life for everyone. These miracle stories are filled with promise – as Jesus offers bread to everyone, offers life to everyone, offers all that we need, offers in unbelievable unimaginable abundance. These are the gifts of God for all the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Today is Worldwide Communion Sunday. I actually love this Holy Day. I love that people of all different cultures, all different abilities, all different approaches, all around the world – come together on this day. I believe it is a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. I imagine this huge incredible banquet table, overflowing with the goodness of God’s creation, piled high with abundance. And I imagine all of us coming together in understanding and acceptance. This is what God promises us for eternity – all God’s people joined together as one in Jesus Christ. Today, we imagine that heaven, we practice that unity, we pray for that promise of God. Today in all corners of the world, and all hours of the day, Christians gather to praise God, and to share this feast which Jesus Christ has prepared for us. God says come to the table. Come as you are. Come. Receive all that God offers. Rejoice together in the presence of Jesus – who loves us – who loves all the world - more than words can express. Imagine and believe. Come to the table. Everyone. Everyone, come.

Clearly in both scripture passages the motivation is love. Both passages say “Jesus had compassion on them.” Jesus saw their need – Jesus sees our need. And Jesus loves us. And Jesus gives us what we need. In both scripture passages Jesus breaks the bread, but in both cases it is the disciples and the crowd who feed one another. Our lesson for today is that indeed God provides, but it is up to us to share the abundance. We are called to feed the world.

It is up to the disciples – to we who would follow Jesus – it is up to us to make sure all are served.

That tells me that when we look at the needs of the world, we must share the compassion of Jesus.

We can’t just sit back and say “God will provide.” Because while that is true, God will provide. It is also true that God wants to use us to reach others, to share the bread, to share the nourishment, to share the love, to share all that God has given, to share the abundance.

It is up to us to feed the world as God has fed us. And as with the bread in these stories that nourishment includes both the concrete physical needs of humanity and the spiritual resources of the grace of God. We are called to share.

We are called to care for others – to satisfy hunger and to share the good news of God’s love. Like Jesus we must see God’s people and have compassion. In both scripture passages for today, the disciples were reluctant. They didn’t believe they were up to the task. “Where could we get enough bread to feed such a crowd?” Jesus says, “Bring them to me.” That’s a twofold request – bring the people to Jesus and bring the resources to Jesus. Bring whatever it is we have to offer – our time, our talent, our prayers, our money, our gifts, our abilities, our resources, even our own needs. Bring what we have and give it freely to Jesus. And God will satisfy need. God will multiply what we offer until it is more than enough. That is God’s promise.

Our second call is to bring the people to Jesus. Bring the hungry, the needy, the blessed, the beautiful and the broken. Bring them to Jesus. Introduce people to Jesus by showing that love we have received. Tell people about God’s love in Jesus Christ – because that is what we need more than anything else. In the bringing, in the coming, in the presence of Jesus, all are satisfied and there is more than enough. In both stories there are baskets full of bread left over. Seven loaves become seven basketfuls after all have been fed in one story, and twelve baskets overflowing in the other. Both seven and twelve are symbolic biblical numbers meaning fullness, completeness, wholeness – God and humanity joined together as one. 3 represents God. 4 is for humanity. So 3 plus 4 is 7 and 3 times 4 is 12. Seven and twelve represent God and humans together. We have everything we need, everything we could possibly ever need. When we are with God we have everything. God’s gifts for us. Today’s stories are stories of abundance. In a world of scarcity and fear and insecurity, people telling us there isn’t enough to go around. In such a world, Jesus offers fullness and satisfaction and hope. God promises everything we will ever need. It’s hard to believe – as we look around and see all the need in the world, as we look around and see only five loaves and two fish. But all four gospel writers say – believe it. God will provide. God has always provided. God will always provide. God will always give us everything we need – bread for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Believe it. That’s what this day is all about – worldwide communion Sunday.

That’s what this table is all about – the Lord’s table open for all who will come.

We imagine a world diverse in all God’s beauty, united through all of Christ’s love, empowered by all of God’s Spirit to supply all the needs of all the world. We imagine and we live into that hope.

Can it possibly be so? Can we possibly feed the entire world by God’s grace? It’s a marvelous image – men and women, boys and girls of every race, creed and color, from every corner of the earth and every moment of time, gathered around this one perfect table of grace, filled to overflowing, and embraced by the love of God. Believe it. Come, children of God, gather round, believe. Receive the gifts of God for all the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.