

Sermon: Proper 13A

Title: What It Is and What It Isn't

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The miracle of “the feeding of the 5000” is one of the most misunderstood of the miracles of Jesus. It appears in every Gospel, so if any of the miracles of the gospels are true, this must be one. I have heard dozens of sermons on this miracle; I bet you have as well. And I have certain pet peeves about sermons about this text, which I am going to take advantage of your being stuck in your seats here, to share with you.

A common misapprehension is that “the way the miracle worked” is that when the baskets of bread and fish were passed around the group, the people gathered there said. “Oh, that’s OK. I brought my own snack,” and passed the basket on without taking any.

That’s very nice. It’s very human. I, myself, almost never go anywhere without a power bar and a bottle of water. But if the people gathered around Jesus on that day came prepared with their own lunch, it’s because God made them practical human beings. It’s not a miracle.

Another theory about “the way that miracle worked” is that people in the group could see that there wasn’t enough and abstained. They passed the basket on, taking nothing from it and saying, “No thank you, I’m not hungry.”

If that was the case, then it was because God made us a people of compassion, selfless and sacrificial in the face of the suffering of our fellow given me. That’s a blessing, but not a miracle.

Now, I will go so far to say there is a possible miracle in the idea that the baskets made their way all the way around that big group and at no point did anybody grab the basket and say, “There is not enough for all of us. There is just enough for me and mine” and clung to the basket and hoarded the food.

Certainly, in the 21st Century, in the wealthiest country in the history of the world, it would be difficult for me to imagine that not a single person in a group of hungry people who were offered a basket of food would not hoard it for their own family. The fact that the basket made it all the way around without anyone grabbing onto it selfishly may in fact, I grant you, be a miracle.

But it’s not the miracle.

Because the miracle of the Feeding of the 5000 is not found in what we did. It is arrogant, and ignorant, to think that any miracle is the consequence of the actions of any human

being. The miracle of the Feeding of the 5000 is found in what *Jesus* does. And what Jesus does is take what we have brought - which is obviously not enough - and make it enough.

We bring what we have and Jesus completes the miracle

Are there any altar guild members here this morning? How many times have we not had enough hosts? How many times have we feared we would run out of wine? And then, miraculously, there is enough.

Are there coffee hour hosts among us? How many times have you had no idea how many people would come, been surprised by the large number, and yet it all worked out.

How many times have you thought you couldn't make it to the next paycheck?
How many times have you thought you didn't have enough gas to get to the gas station?
How many times have you thought you didn't have what it takes to get through this crisis?
How many dark nights have you been through? And the dawn always comes.

We bring what we have, and we know from long experience that that is never enough. But we bring it in faith, knowing that Jesus will complete the miracle.

It's worth mentioning that the miracle of the loaves and fishes is not transactional. Jesus doesn't say "you feed them *and then* I will help." God's love is unconditional, not a quid pro quo. Jesus feeds us in body, mind and spirit out of love alone.

I'm going to say that again because it matters: All that Jesus does for us, he does because he loves us unconditionally.

So, I have told you what I think *is not happening* at the miracle at the Feeding of the 5000. Now, let me tell you what I think is happening.

Just before he leaves his friends, Jesus implores them to "love each other as I have loved you." And when the baskets with five loaves and two fish are passed among the crowd, there is no mention of arguing or fighting. There is no "murmuring" or complaining.

Rather, there is a gathering of people who, in the face of scarcity, are asked by their Messiah to step out in faith. However unlikely, unprecedented, and impossible it seems, these people are asked to believe that Jesus will make the miracle. These are people who, in the midst of a challenge, have chosen to be patient with one another, to be generous toward one another ... to love each other as Jesus has loved them.

We look at this miracle and we say, "Just when we thought there would not be enough, Jesus brought us a miracle and we were fed." But I wonder if Jesus looked at this event and said, "Just when I thought they would never learn it, they showed me that they already had."

There is no record in our scripture of how Jesus reacted to “the miracle of” the Feeding of the 5000 ... but I have to believe he smiled.

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