

Compassionately Feeding Thousands

August 6, 2023

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Gospel reading from Matthew for this morning may appear straightforward. After hearing that John the Baptist had died, Jesus got into a boat and withdrew from the crowd to a desolate place to be by Himself. However, the crowds followed Him, so when He came ashore, He had compassion on them and healed those who were sick. Then with the sun going down in the evening, the disciples said to Jesus that He should send the crowds away so that they can get something to eat. But in response, Jesus told them they did not need to go away. Rather, Jesus provided a meal for those who were there, some 5,000 men plus women and children, which may have been 10,000 people in total, with just five loaves and two fish.

This account must have left a big impression on the early Christian church because it is included in all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But how can this happen, feeding thousands of people with just five loaves and two fish? There are often two explanations. The first explanation is that the people must have brought some food with them. However, this explanation does not make sense. While most people look out for themselves, and being out in a desolate place people might have been more apt to share what they had with others, but for that to happen, half of the crowd must have brought food so that everyone would have been fed. Also, this makes you wonder then why Jesus' disciples said there were only five loaves and two fish.

The other explanation is that it was truly a miracle, something extraordinary that manifested divine intervention. Even today, feeding that many people with only five loaves and two fish is extremely unusual and outstanding. Some people say every birth, every child, and every person is a miracle, because we are more than just flesh and blood; we are the image of God. But if you and I were there on that day, and understood what was going on, would we have been astounded?

Today, not too many people really know where our food comes from. If we wanted to find out, we might do a Google search for a rudimentary understanding, or we could find a scientist in the field of food production to share with us how the sun, carbon dioxide, soil chemistry, rainwater, genetics, and other things might produce grains like wheat and corn, and how farmers, bakers, and truck drivers do their parts to get the bread to us the consumers. But doesn't that seem like too much work? The food production in our country has become so efficient that what seems to be extraordinary is not that we can have all this food so readily accessible, but rather that there is such a thing as food insecurity in our country.

Yet, historically food production was a lot of work. Certainly, those who were there that day would have understood that in order to have food available, you needed to work for it. While those in the crowd did not realize what had happened, they also believed that it was God who made it possible for them to have food. And as any Jewish person believed at that time, He was the One who truly provided them their food. He was the One who brought them out of Egypt, provided for them out in the desert, and gave to them a land “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex.3:8).

Sometimes, like them, we can get ungrateful. We have all come to expect the best and finest foods. We go out to eat at restaurants and expect them to accommodate our specialized diets. And if they don't, we say that the restaurant is not very good. We expect the best produce at the grocery store. And when we are hungry, we expect food to be available for us

wherever we happen to be. If we're hungry, all we need to do is order it on our phone, and companies like Uber, Grubhub, and Door Dash make sure that it is delivered to us within minutes, whether we're at home, at work, or on vacation.

But as we do so, we perhaps forget that God truly is the One who provides for all our needs. As King David once wrote, "The eyes of all look to You [God], and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:15-16). It is God's provision that allows for us to enjoy these comforts. He is the one who provides what is needed for plants to grow, fish to spawn, and all the rest to be provided to us, which fulfills our prayer in the 4th petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."

If you recall, the disciples wanted Jesus to send all those people away so that they could get food for themselves. And even though it was getting late, Jesus replied, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat" (v.16). Of course, He knew what was on their hearts. But maybe He was looking into the future, beyond His death and resurrection, and even ascension, when they would be called to be His hands and feet in the world, caring for the physical and spiritual needs of people, and demonstrate to the world how to "love your neighbor as yourself."

This is our calling as well. While the Lord has blessed each of us with the ability to show compassion and care for our neighbors in need, not everyone does so. Our Social Ministries and Mission teams are currently seeing a greater need in the lives of those around us. And while Benevolence requests are being handled appropriately, the number of requests as well as their amounts have been increasing both locally and abroad. As members of Our Savior's Way, we are called to "give them something to eat" and respond to the needs of our neighbors.

Of course, our number one calling is to share the Good News of Christ, His forgiveness and love that comes to us through the cross that we might go out into the mission field as His disciples and be His hands and feet in the world. For ever since the early church began, it has provided for those in need, so much so that it overwhelmed the apostles. According to the book of Acts, they said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). But instead of ignoring those in need, they selected others, full of the spirit and wisdom, to do so. Why? Because our Lord and Savior is compassionate with all in need. And those who embrace God’s love respond with love to the needs of others.

May each one of us do so, until that day when our Lord takes us all home to be with Him in Heaven.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.