

**Ninth Sunday after Pentecost A  
Incarnation Lutheran Church**

**YOU DO IT!**

**THE STORY OF THIS MIRACLE – THE FEEDING OF 5,000 MEN PLUS THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ALSO PRESENT THAT DAY – THEREBY RAISING THE NUMBER TO 10-15 THOUSAND – THIS STORY IS FOUND IN ALL FOUR GOSPELS. IN MARK AND LUKE IT’S LOCATED RIGHT AFTER THE 70 DISCIPLES SENT OUT BY JESUS TO THE VILLAGES TO CURE THE SICK AND PREACH THE GOSPEL RETURN TO TELL JESUS ABOUT THEIR ADVENTURES. HERE, IN MATTHEW, TODAY’S GOSPEL TEXT, IT’S FOUND RIGHT AFTER JESUS HEARS THE NEWS THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST IS DEAD – BEHEADED BY HEROD AT THE REQUEST OF A DANCING GIRL NAMED SALOME. IN JOHN, THE STORY COMES AFTER JESUS HEALS THE LAME MAN ON A SABBATH – THUS STIRRING UP THE ANGER OF THE RIGHTEOUS LEADERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE. JOHN’S ACCOUNT, BY THE WAY, IS THE ONE WITH WHICH WE ARE MOST FAMILIAR – THE ONE WHERE ANDREW FINDS A LITTLE BOY IN THE CROWD WHO OFFERS HIS FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH.**

**BUT REGARDLESS OF THE SETTING, THERE ARE SIMILARITIES IN ALL FOUR ACCOUNTS. CROWDS OF PEOPLE FOLLOW JESUS – EVEN AS HE TRIES TO GET AWAY TO A QUIET PLACE FOR REST AND FOR PRAYER. HE SEES THEIR NEEDS, HAS COMPASSION ON THEM – AND GIVES UP HIS PRIVATE TIME TO GO AND SERVE THEM. THE CROWDS STAY ALL DAY – LISTENING AND LEARNING AS HE TEACHES AND WATCHING IN AWE AS HE HEALS THEIR SICK. THE DAY**

**GETS LONG. THE PEOPLE GET HUNGRY. BREAD AND FISH ARE FOUND AND BLESSED – AND ALL ARE FED.**

**SOMETIMES, WHEN SERMONS ARE PREACHED ON THIS MIRACLE, THERE IS A FOCUS ON HOW THAT SMALL AMOUNT OF FOOD WAS MULTIPLIED SO THAT ALL THOSE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WERE FED. QUESTIONS ARE RAISED – LIKE - DID JESUS JUST MULTIPLY THE FOOD RIGHT THERE BEFORE THEIR EYES LIKE SOME MAGIC TRICK SO THAT THE PEOPLE WOULD SEE THE POWER GIVEN TO HIM BY GOD? - OR – DID THE PEOPLE SEE THE LITTLE BOY OFFER HIS FOOD, FEEL GUILTY BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN HIDING THEIR OWN AND SO THEY BEGIN SIMPLY TO SHARE WITH ONE ANOTHER? EITHER WAY – THE POWER OF GOD OR PEOPLE WILLING TO SHARE – IS QUITE A MIRACLE.**

**ANOTHER MORE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION, PERHAPS, IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN AND AMONG THIS MIRACLE AND THE CRUCIFIXION OF OUR LORD JESUS AND OUR SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION. IN THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 PLUS WOMEN AND CHILDREN, JESUS TOOK THE FIVE LOAVES AND THE TWO FISH, LOOKED UP TO HEAVEN, BLESSED IT, BROKE IT AND GAVE IT TO THE DISCIPLES WHO GAVE THE FOOD TO THE PEOPLE. WHO ATE AND WERE FILLED – OR – AS A MORE ACCURATE INTERPRETATION OF THAT PHRASE READS - THEY ATE TO THEIR HEART’S CONTENT - WITH 12 BASKETS LEFT OVER. ON THE CROSS, JESUS’ BODY WAS BROKEN AND HIS LIFE GIVEN SO THAT ALL OF HUMANKIND MIGHT BE FED WITH GOD’S GIFTS OF GRACE AND MERCY AND LOVE. AND EACH TIME WE CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION, WE RECEIVE THAT BROKEN BODY AND**

**OUTPOURED BLOOD OF CHRIST GIVEN FOR YOU – AND FOR YOU – AND FOR YOU. AND AS LUTHER SAYS IN THE SMALL CATECHISM, *THE WORDS “GIVEN FOR YOU AND SHED FOR YOU FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN” SHOW US THAT FORGIVENESS OF SIN, LIFE, AND SALVATION ARE GIVEN TO US IN THE SACRAMENT THROUGH THESE WORDS, BECAUSE WHERE THERE IS FORGIVENESS OF SIN, THERE IS ALSO LIFE AND SALVATION.*” AND SO, A POWERFUL THEOLOGICAL TEACHING IN THIS MIRACLE STORY – BREAD BROKEN, BLESSED, AND GIVEN – ALL FOR THE SAKE OF THE SALVATION OF WORLD.**

**AND WHILE IT’S TRUE AND ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO DISCERN THE THEOLOGICAL DEPTH OF THIS MIRACLE STORY, I WANT TO SHIFT OUR FOCUS TO ANOTHER APPROACH THIS MORNING. I WANT TO NARROW IN ON THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE DISCIPLES AND JESUS JUST BEFORE THE PEOPLE ARE FED. JESUS, YOU REMEMBER, HAS TRIED TO WITHDRAW TO A DESERTED PLACE FOR SOME ALONE TIME, BUT THE CROWDS SEEK HIM OUT. HE SEES THEIR NEEDS, HAS COMPASSION ON THEM AND SPENDS HIS DAY LISTENING TO THEM AND HEALING THEIR ILLS. IT GETS LATE AND THE DISCIPLES REMIND JESUS THAT THE PEOPLE ARE GETTING HUNGRY AND THERE ARE NO STORES CLOSE BY WHERE FOOD CAN BE BOUGHT – AND THEY WILL HAVE TO WALK SOME DISTANCE JUST TO GET HOME. “SO,” THE DISCIPLES TELL JESUS, “YOU BETTER SEND THEM ON THEIR WAY BEFORE IT GETS DARK.” “NO,” JESUS SAYS. “THERE’S NO NEED TO DO THAT. YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT. YOU DO IT.” AND THEIR ANSWER, “WE CAN’T. WE HAVE NOTHING BUT FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH.”**

**“YES, YOU CAN,” JESUS TELLS THEM. “BRING THEM TO ME.” HE BLESSES THAT MEAGER FOOD, GIVES IT BACK TO THE DISCIPLES, AND THEY INDEED, FEED THE PEOPLE – ALL THE PEOPLE.**

**A CARTOON IS TAPED ON THE DOOR OF THE ENTRANCE TO THE MEDIA CENTER IN THE NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD OFFICE. “WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN,” THE FIRST CHARACTER SAYS, “I’M GOING TO ASK GOD WHY THERE ARE SO MANY HUNGRY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.” “AND I SUSPECT,” SAYS HIS FRIEND, “THAT WHEN YOU GET TO HEAVEN, GOD WILL BE ASKING YOU THE SAME QUESTION.”**

**I BELIEVE THAT. I BELIEVE WE WILL BE ASKED THAT SAME QUESTION BECAUSE I THINK JESUS STILL SAYS THE SAME THING TO US TODAY THAT HE SAID TO THOSE DISCIPLES THAT DAY LONG AGO. “YOU DO IT. YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES. YOU FEED THEM.”**

**AND THE NEED IS VAST. LISTEN TO THESE STATISTICS FROM THE ELCA WORLD HUNGER PROGRAM:**

**+ 795 MILLION PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD – THAT’S 1 IN 10 – CANT ACCESS THE FOOD THEY NEED TO LIVE ACTIVE, HEALTHY LIVES.**

**+ ACCORDING TO THE MOST RECENT ESTIMATES ALMOST 770,00 MILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN EXTREME POVERTY ON LESS THAN \$1.90 PER DAY.**

**+42.1 MILLION AMERICANS WERE LIVING IN POVERTY IN 2015. FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR, THIS MEANS THEIR ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME WAS BELOW \$24,250.**

HERE IN SOUTH CAROLINA, ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CLOSE TO 1 IN 5 HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN POVERTY AND MORE THAN 27% OF OUR STATE'S CHILDREN – OR 1 IN 4 – LIVE IN POVERTY. THAT'S THE FIFTH HIGHEST IN THE NATION. THE STATISTICS FOR COLUMBIA AND RICHLAND COUNTY ARE JUST AS DEVASTATING – ALMOST 19% IN RICHLAND COUNTY; 24% IN COLUMBIA. HARVEST HOPE PROVIDES FOOD TO ALMOST 2 MILLION PEOPLE ANNUALLY. TRANSITIONS, AN ORGANIZATION WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO MOVE PEOPLE FROM HOMELESSNESS INTO PERMANENT HOUSING, HOUSES ABOUT 260 ADULTS (MEN AND WOMEN) WHO NEED TO BE FED DAILY.

SO, WHAT DO WE DO? WHAT DO WE DO WHEN JESUS SAYS TO US, “YOU DO IT? YOU FEED THEM.”

DO WE LIKE THE DISCIPLES, SAY WE CAN'T. DO WE, LIKE THEM, LOOK AT THESE STAGGERING NUMBERS OF HUNGRY PEOPLE AND SAY WE CAN'T DO IT? AND THE TRUTH IS, WE CAN'T. NOT ON OUR OWN WE CAN'T! BUT LISTEN, JESUS BIDS US TO BRING OUR FOOD TO HIM SO THAT HE MIGHT BLESS IT, HAND IT BACK TO US AND SEND US OUT TO FEED A HUNGRY WORLD. AND IF THE WHOLE CHURCH ACROSS THE WORLD WOULD ASK JESUS TO BLESS OUR EFFORTS, THERE WOULD BE MORE THAN ENOUGH TO FEED THEM ALL. IN FACT, THERE ALREADY IS ENOUGH....SOME OF US ARE JUST EATING MORE THAN OUR SHARE.

PERHAPS WE FIND OUR MODEL FOR FEEDING THE HUNGRY BY LOOKING AT WHAT JESUS DID – OR DIDN'T DO – THAT DAY SO LONG AGO. HE

**DIDN'T SEND THE CROWDS AWAY. HE DIDN'T SEND SOME OF THEM AWAY AND FEED A SELECT FEW. HE DID NOT ASK IF EVERYONE IN THE CROWD WAS A JEW, OR WHAT THEIR OCCUPATION AND INCOME WAS, OR IF – GOD FORBID – ANY WERE GENTILE. AND HE DIDN'T ASK IF ANY WERE HUNGRY BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN FAILURES AND THEREFORE SHOULDN'T EAT. HE DIDN'T DO ANY OF THAT. HE SIMPLY SAW THAT PEOPLE WERE HUNGRY AND HE FED THEM. AND HE DID THIS IN SPITE OF HIS BEING TIRED, IN SPITE OF HIS GRIEVING FOR HIS COUSIN JOHN, IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT THE CROWDS HAD TAKEN FROM HIM HIS NEED TO BE ALONE...IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING JESUS DID WHAT HE DID BECAUSE OF HIS COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE TO HUMAN NEED – NOT COUNTING THE COST TO HIMSELF. THEY WERE HUNGRY – AND HE FED THEM.**

**THAT'S WHAT JESUS DID. AND THAT'S WHAT HE CALLS US TO DO – IN HIS NAME. WE WHO FEED AT THIS TABLE OF FORGIVENESS AND GRACE ARE SENT, THEN, OUT IN HIS NAME TO FEED THE HUNGRY, CLOTHE THE NAKED, CARE FOR THE SICK. TEND TO THE NEEDS OF THE POOR – “FOR INASMUCH AS WE HAVE DONE IT TO THE LEAST OF THESE,” JESUS TELLS US, YOU HAVE DONE IT TO ME.”.**

**“YOU DO IT. YOU FEED THEM.” WILL YOU? AMEN.**