

Isaiah 55:1-5

Matthew 14:13-21

Romans 9:1-5

“You open your hand, O Lord;
and satisfy every living thing.

Near to all who call on you...
calling in truth.” AMEN!

(Sing Hymn 485)

With voices bright and even a little choked
with emotion,

from the powerful words of the hymn,
we sing this truth always.

Christ is the Bread of life.

You raise us up, today, O God and
you will raise us up on the last day. (Pause)

Today’s gospel lesson is the familiar
miracle story of Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000.

And we should know, that it was really
a lot more people than that
since we’re told that
women and children weren’t counted,
but they were surely there and,
with everyone else, truly hungry.

Hunger.

I have never tasted real hunger.

Sure, I've said many times that "I'm starving!"

But, not really was I actually starving.

I simply wanted food.

Perhaps the hungriest I've ever been was
when I participated in the "30 Hour Famine"
with the teenagers in my youth group

down in Largo, FL where I was youth director, long ago.

It helped to open my eyes to the reality of
global poverty and we learned

that in 30 hours, just over one day,
but still a short time, 7,000 kids will die of
hunger related causes.

The numbers today are debatable but
the fact of the matter is....
women and children are disproportionately
affected by hunger.

When I planned the 30 hours the way
the program suggested.

There were times for study, meditation, and rest.

There was, of course, a lot of water available
for the kids and me to keep us hydrated and
at least we could fill our bellies with
life giving water.

We were reminded that such a luxury as this
was not available for most people in the midst of
real starvation.

It was also taught that when it came time to
break the fast, we were advised to not
“pig-out” on pizza or other kinds of fast food,

since it would likely be quickly rejected
by our empty stomachs.

So I had prepared plain oatmeal and/or grits
to eat when the 30 Hours ended.

Needless to say, the kids were not happy with
this option, but when I explained the
reason they understood.

It was incredible how good plain oatmeal tasted

after the fast.

We all relished it.

Imagine that! Relishing plain oatmeal. :-)

I remember that when I think about
5 loaves of bread and two fish
that miraculously fed thousands.

The foods must have danced on people's tongues.

Some of you have experienced true hunger.

The kind that is life threatening, but most here
are (probably) like me and we just say,
"We're starving," when we want food...
not when we need it.

Yet this Jesus provided for both needs.

Just because someone may have food
doesn't mean they don't hunger
for what's missing in life. (Pause)

A man came to my office while I was
youth director because he knew I had
young children and he wanted to tell me
about a person that was missing
in his life.

A relationship he was starving for.

He said, “Tom, we set ourselves up for a lot of pain when we have children, especially when we love them too much.”

I recall wondering how a parent could love a child too much?

So he told me.

He said, “I have a 34 year old son in Denver, CO that I have not seen or heard from for 5 years.

He lives on the streets out there.”

With a quivering voice he told me his son was houseless and then he expressed his parental pain about how he and his wife tried to help him in the beginning.

“We tried everything, even to the extent of depleting our savings and retirement accounts.

We burnt the candle at both ends until the pain from the flame became too excruciating.”

When they discovered the money they

were sending to help wasn't being
utilized properly, but led their boy into
more destructive behavior,

they decided there was nothing more to
do for their son - if he was not going to try
to get real help for himself.

In that moment of intense starvation
for a relationship with their son, he said
how "every ounce of compassion and
every bit of generosity was,
in the end, devoured."

He added, that our wanting to help
"enabled him to not live up to the life
he needed to live on his own.

I feel like I'm starving and hollow inside
when I wake up some nights and wonder,
"Where is my son?" (Pause)

When Jesus saw the crowd that
had followed him into the wilderness
he had compassion for them.

Sure, they were hungry, some were likely
really starving, but we are also told
that he healed them.

The sick, hurting and the hungry, Jesus healed.

Some of us today need that healing.

Or people we care about need that healing.

Some of us here need to be like the disciples, too,
and hear what Jesus said,

“You need not send them away,
you give them something to eat.”

When the disciples heard this from Jesus they said,

“We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”

I can relate to their response.

“Who am I?

I am just one person.

I’m barely making ends meet, too.”

When we say such things.

And I say them, too.

We participate in life with the attitude of scarcity,
instead of an assurance of abundance.

The scarcity becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If we think we lack then we will.

When we know of God's abundance then
we are indeed abundant.

And another thing, look at to whom they say

“We have nothing here...”

With Jesus right there, they say those words,
but we do, too.

We should be saying, “With you here, Jesus,
we have everything and can work
miracles of feeding and relationship building.”

Five loaves and two fish suddenly became enough
to feed thousands and people sat down to eat
and formed new relationship and
ties with others. (Pause)

The true Bread of Life gives us a taste
for tomorrow and a prelude to
the miracles that await.

It is God's invitation to abundance and
to knowledge and to relish

in new community.

This is the basis for our gathering and
the way of our welcome to each and
every person around the communion table.

What we do here, at St. Stephen, is shaped
by this text of the feeding of the 5,000+
where everyone was welcome and
everyone fed.

It overflows to every breakfast, lunch and
dinner that we share, too, when we eat with
one another there is the presence of God.

The Bread of life, Christ's own body
for the hungry and for the lost.

AMEN!