

Last week, the scripture Laurie had read was from Mark's Gospel and today the scripture reading is taken from the gospel of John. If, as Laurie described last week, we read from verse 30 to 56 and not just the Markan sandwich, we would have read about the 5,000 people being fed. John's gospel for today tells the same story. I wonder, do both gospels tell the exact same story? To answer that question, I took a look at both readings, I compared them for similarities and differences.

John's gospel specifically mentions the disciples Philip and Andrew. One of the gospels costs out the food to feed 5,000 people at 8 months wages while the other costs it out at 200 denarii. The boy is not mentioned in Mark's gospel, but the 5 loaves and 2 fish is mentioned in both gospels. John's gospel ends with Jesus withdrawing and the reason for this to happen.

"When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself" (Jn 6:15). Why did they want to make him king? That is the end of the story, but let's begin at the beginning to see why.

The story today is about Jesus, it's about a crowd, it's about a boy, about 5 loaves and 2 fish. Think about the story – think about 'Who you might be in this story? Are you the boy who is kind enough to share, even though it may not be enough, for your lunch? Are you one of the disciples, more anxious about spending lots of money to buy food, than caring for your neighbours? Maybe you are one of the people in the crowd, distracted from listening to Jesus because you are hungry. Most of us take on varying roles in this story as the context around us changes.

"A large crowd kept following him," says John (v. 2). Can there be a surer sign of success than this? Who can argue with numbers? Look at the bottom line - a large crowd. Jesus has become popular.

Then John tells us why they were following Jesus. "They saw the signs that he was doing for the sick" (v. 2). Jesus was healing the hurting multitudes. If there is one indisputable, uncontested good that we have, it is health. Great crowds are following Jesus because they see his signs. He heals them. He meets their needs.

Curiously, Jesus does not continue to meet their needs. Next verse: "Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples" (v. 3). Even a dedicated do-gooder like Jesus needs a break, a temporary respite from meeting people's needs – shades of last week's sermon, "Overcoming Compassion Fatigue".

Jesus looks down from his mountain retreat and "saw a large crowd coming toward him" (v. 5). Having a bit of fun with Philip, Jesus asks, "Philip, how much money do you think it would take to cater a meal for such a crowd?"

It's at this point in the story that Andrew tells Jesus, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

This young boy, I think was a little like me when I was younger, always hungry. I'm thinking that this boy's mother, knowing her son, packed that lunch for him. Would 5 loaves and 2 fish satisfy a young teenager's hunger?

He was hungry and just as he is about to begin eating his 5 small barley loaves and 2 fish - a shadow darkens the sun from his eyes. What? A man was standing over him and asking for his lunch? It's for the teacher, to feed the large crowd who had been listening to him. **Right!**

If you were this boy; What would your reaction have been? Would you have said:

1. Take a hike, it's my meal!

2. Take a collection and go to the nearest “BODEGA” and buy food to feed the masses
3. Go pick on someone else! I’m starving and this won’t even be enough for me!
4. Or was he just speechless?

The questions don’t really matter, because it’s the answer. All that matters is; that the boy did share his lunch! Would you have shared your lunch with a crowd that size?

I ask this question to explore a different dimension of the story. We know because of our faith that Jesus could have fed the 5,000 people without asking for any human help. He is the Living Word, through whom everything was created. But Jesus honours the boy by asking for his help. Through Andrew, Jesus invites the boy to an act of stewardship in which the boy gives what he has, so that God may bless, in this case, an extremely hungry crowd.

According to Parent Effectiveness Training, a win/win situation occurs when both parties win. Now, two weeks ago, in the UEFA championship only one team could win. Both England and Italy could not be UEFA champions. I was sad, because when there is a winner, think Italy, there is also a loser like England. That is not a win-win situation.

But in today’s story, Jesus wins because he demonstrates God’s power, in a different way, by feeding the people. The boy and the people win, because they get the food they need to satisfy their hungers. This is a win-win situation.

This is a thumbnail picture of God’s win/win game. If we win, God wins. The boy gave his lunch to Jesus and there was enough food for all. We can never give God more than God gives to us. God always wins in the game of giving. In any situation, God always gives us more than we give to God or others.

But we also live in a world of hunger. Many around us are hungry. In some ways, so are we; but not always for food! Some hunger for a love that values them, while others hunger for friendship. Some hunger for respect, while others receive satisfaction for what they do. Some hunger for jobs that support loved ones; some hunger for justice, for hope.

Look on that endless amount of hunger. Then listen to Jesus. Hear what Jesus says to his closest followers. He asks them to help. He asks the disciples, “Where shall we buy bread for these people?” Andrew finds a young boy who is asked to give up his small lunch to feed the masses that have gathered.

In receiving the child’s gift and using it to bless all the hungry with food, Jesus shows us who he is. As the bread and fish from the child become food enough to feed all who are hungry, so Jesus, the Bread of Life, has become the “bread” to feed every hunger – physical and spiritual – that human beings could ever have.

But Jesus also shows us that God asks for our help in feeding the world with God’s blessings. Our lives, when given in love to God, are blessed and become channels of grace. The bread and fish were channels for God’s blessing. The disciples of Jesus – those who received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and planted the church in every known country – were channels of God’s blessing.

God longs to have us join in the divine game of blessing. Will you give thanks for God’s providence and salvation by surrendering your gifts to Jesus just as the child surrendered his lunch? Will you then watch Jesus perform miracles in the midst of your life and our life together in our world? It’s a win/win situation.

When we win, God wins, and when God wins, we win. But it is also true that no one wins until everyone wins.

Anyway, that’s the game plan, having a win/win world.