

Sunday July 25 - Sermon on John 6:1-21

The feeding of the five thousand. It's a familiar story that we know quite well. Jesus is surrounded by a large crowd. It is getting late in the day and people start to get hungry. Everyone looks around confused and unsure of what to do. Jesus decides he wants to feed the people but the disciples say that it will cost too much. Soon enough, it is discovered that one young boy has tucked away in his knapsack, presumably hidden from these hungry mob, five loaves of bread and two fish. Which seems like a lot for just one boy to be carrying but the story goes on anyways.

This meager amount of food seems like a waste of time if you ask the disciples. It will never be enough. I mean, what's five loaves and two fish for five thousand hungry people? But then Jesus has everyone sit down, he takes the loaves of bread and the two fish and he turns it into enough food for everyone to eat their fill and, in fact, for there to be plenty of leftovers too. It's a nice and familiar story.

I don't know about you, but even though this is a familiar story, anytime a miracle story like this comes up, it always seems to throw me for a loop. My mind takes over and I start asking all sorts of questions. Did that really happen? What's the truth in this story? Do you ever do that when you hear some of these Bible stories? I often think that there has to be a logical explanation. So that's what I do.

Often, I try to explain the miracle. Like when Jesus is at the wedding at Cana and all the wine runs out and so Jesus magically turns water into wine so that the party doesn't need to stop. Sometimes, I wonder if he didn't just dilute the wine that was there with water, thus seemingly making more wine, or if there were just extra jars underneath the table that no one knew were there.

Or let's take the five barley loaves and two fish that feed 5,000 people. I mean, did the fish and the bread simply grow back any time someone took a bite out of it, or did Jesus multiply them at the beginning into hundreds of loaves and fishes, dividing them among the people? Or did it happen, as preacher Barbara Brown Taylor suggests, through the people being moved by this child giving over everything he had, that they could feel their hidden food weighing down their pockets and their heavy guilt weighing down their hearts. And so, as the baskets were passed and the people slipped some of their own bread and fish in, so as to share with everyone. I kind of like that explanation.

The reason I do this...the reason I try to explain miracles, I think, is because of all of the miracles that don't happen in our lives. If I can logically explain how this supposed miracle happened, then maybe I don't have to wonder about why other miracles don't happen.

But then, as I do these mental gymnastics when it comes to trying to explain Jesus' miracle, I get stuck. And frustrated. And angry. Because suddenly I feel as if my whole life of faith is spent focusing on if and how something in the Bible really happened or not. And the truth is, we can never know. Which makes me wonder – maybe I am missing the point. Maybe the point of the story isn't whether you believe that it happened or not or whether there is a logical explanation. Maybe the point of the story isn't worry about whether it happened or not, but what the story itself is trying to say.

So here we are today, we have a story about a man named Jesus. A man whom we claim to be the revelation of God for us. And he feeds five thousand hungry people with a meager five loaves and two fish. It's a story that says, "Jesus is about feeding people who are hungry." Which to us means God is about feeding people who are hungry. But what I can't figure out is why Jesus

used these five loaves of bread and two fish to feed everyone. I mean, he's Jesus. Why didn't he just make bread and fish appear out of thin air? But no. Jesus took this small offering of food, which really amounts to almost nothing when you consider the size of this crowd. It says something that Jesus takes what this young boy has to offer, these puny, insignificant five loaves and two fish and uses them to feed the crowd gathered there.

It says that God can work with the meager offerings of the people of God to do great things for the needs of this world. It says that God can take the puny and insignificant things that we've tucked away and kept hidden from those around us and God can use it. It says that when you've got almost nothing to give, God can use that.

In fact, if we look back at Scripture, this seems like God's favorite way to work in the world. It seems like God's favorite thing to do is take something that is broken, or worthless, or empty and to use it. I mean, God used the barren and closed woman of Sarah to give birth to Isaac at the old age of 90. God took Moses, a murderer, and used him to lead God's people out of Egypt. God used a poor peasant carpenter to be the savior of the world by dying on a cross.

In our Christian story, God does not conquer the world with power and might, God dies. And then God is resurrected. Which means God will go into the darkest places of the world, the most empty place, the place most void of any hope – the place of death and God will bring about life. If there is one theme in the Scriptures that can feed us it is that God takes not our successes and our gifts, but our weaknesses and our meager places and uses those. Amen.