

*It Takes a Kid*

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145:10-18  
Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever noticed how kids can get right to the point? There was an English teacher after summer vacation who was trying to get the class warmed up with grammar. She wrote on the board, "I ain't had no fun this summer," and asked the class how that might be corrected. To which young Freddy at the back of the class leapt up, waved his hand, and said, "Miss Hughes, Miss Hughes, you need to get a boyfriend." Freddy solved to problem, but he did it on a much deeper level than the teacher was expecting.

In a similar fashion, there was a mother one summer who was emptying out the refrigerator and came across one portion of tortellini, which she gave to her youngest son, who began to enjoy it with much relish. His elder brother was miffed. He wanted some of what his younger brother was having. As kids will have it, it wasn't long before they were bickering. But their father thought he could bring a solution to the problem by turning this into a theological issue. So, he asked his youngest son, "You know with something going on like this, what would Jesus do?" Pushing aside a mouthful, his youngest son said to him, "Oh Daddy, that's easy. He'd make more."

Think about that answer and the expression of faith that it conveys. You see I think that's what we're reading about in the Gospel this morning. A story or stories about faith and discipleship. Faith – it's a greatly misunderstood concept. Faith in Jesus who can feed 5000 people. Faith in a Jesus who walks on water. Well, we have a hard time about that sort of thing because it leads us directly into questioning and confronting what the Gospel says. When we read that, we're brought face-to-face with what we know of the physical and modern and scientific world. Feeding 5000 people with five loaves and two fish? Walking on water during a storm on the Sea of Galilee? Could it be that there's something much deeper about faith going on here than simply feeding a large number of people with a little, or walking on water in a storm?

Having crossed over the Sea of Galilee, if you've been following these last two weeks, it's pretty dizzying about where Jesus is on the shores. He's pursued by a great number of people who understand that Jesus can bring to them what it is they feel they desperately want. On first reading it appears that Jesus is a man filled with compassion who understands such needs and is ready to meet them even when nothing appears to be there for him to use. Jesus does have compassion and he asks Phillip, a disciple, how they are to be fed, although, according to John, Jesus already has the solution in mind. John makes it clear, then, that this story is not about Jesus' compassion at all. Rather, John is using this story of the feeding of the crowd to provide some very, very fundamental and basic instruction in faith and discipleship.

Listen, listen as the details of the story unfold. In response to Jesus' question about where are we

going to get enough to feed these people, Phillip replies that there's nowhere near enough to purchase such food. Phillip doesn't bother to say there's nowhere on the mountain to go buy it, he goes immediately to the practical issue of – there isn't enough money. The cost, Phillip points out, is far too great. It's not only an honest response, it's a practical response, it's a realistic response. It is, I dare say, a common response used in today's society and in today's church. "You know, Pastor, it would be nice if we could do thus and so, but, well, we just can't afford it."

You'll notice, Jesus doesn't respond to Phillip with a brow-beating sermon on stewardship. "Oh, this crowd's got all the money in the world, it's only a matter of getting them to loosen their purse strings." Nor does Jesus criticize the response and say to Phillip, "Oh Phillip, if you only had faith this would all go away." But we're left, are we not, with an uncomfortable feeling that Jesus somehow expects more of Phillip at this time. And if he's expecting more from Phillip, then it's hard to escape the conclusion that he's expecting more from us.

Then Andrew joins into the fray and makes a note that there's a kid present. The kid has five barley loaves and two fish, but – there's always a but – but of course, Andrew points out, realistically, that five loaves and two fish are going to go no where in a crowd of the size of that which faces them. The truth of the matter is, although the kid has some food, it's clearly not enough. And again we're brought face-to-face with a common theme in our society here and in the church – the notion that the prevailing reality is scarcity, not abundance. There just isn't enough to go around, so we'd better hang on to what we've got.

What are we going to say? That Andrew's crazy? Of course not. Andrew's being practical and realistic. Oh my, practical and realistic. Those are key words these days, aren't they? But there goes that uncomfortable feeling again that somehow Jesus expects more of Andrew. And if he expects more of Andrew, well, maybe, he expects more of us. But again, Jesus doesn't lecture Andrew, nor does he criticize him. And it's at this very point that we're brought to the crux of the matter in this story.

It's a sort of a Paul Harvey point. Some of you won't know who Paul Harvey is, others of you will. If you want to get to know Paul Harvey, he's on WHP at 8:30 a.m., and again at twelve noon. It might help if you listen to him to make sense of what I'm trying to say to you.

Well, Paul Harvey has these radio spots where he tells stories about people who do impossible, extraordinary things with their lives. And just in the story, when everything seems hopeless and impossible they break for a commercial. You have to wait until the commercial is over when Paul Harvey comes back and says those famous words, "And now, for the rest of the story."

For the rest of the story after Phillip and Andrew, what follows – in a Gospel that has no Last Supper and no Upper Room and the time of Passover – what follows is simply a Passover communion. Listen to how it goes. Jesus took the loaves of bread and when he had given thanks he distributed them. Five loaves, broken for 5000, and all were fed. It's interesting, don't you think, that's it left to the disciples to gather up the leftovers. Twelve baskets, you'll note.

Enough for one basket for each disciple. I can tell you this, if I'd been Phillip or Andrew, I would have been embarrassed out of my skull when I had to go and pick up those leftovers.

But John has more to teach us and he speaks volumes to us in our day and age where success is measured by popularity which is translated into large numbers. This crowd that faces Jesus is shown to be shallow and utilitarian. They prepare to take Jesus by force and install him as their king. Well, why not? He would supply them with everything they required, or at least everything they thought they wanted. It's the kind of thinking that skews God's grace and turns Jesus into nothing more than an errand boy who satisfies any and every human want and whim.

Just listen to those popular preachers whose congregations number the thousands. Some offer to heal every ailment. Others offer to show you how faith will give you outstanding personal and business success. And still others offer programs by which preachers can fill their churches to the rafters. And yet, popularity is exactly what Jesus avoids. He's aware of its poison. He understands how terrible and deadly popularity is, and Jesus turns his back on the crowd and departs further up the mountain to be alone.

The meal is over and the disciples set sail. It's the middle of the night – the term John uses not only to describe the time of day, but the blindness of those who cannot see God at work in front of their very eyes. In the darkness, then, the disciples who are still learning much about faith and discipleship, who are still being confronted by the revelation of the power of God vested in Jesus, those disciples are caught in a storm. Jesus comes to them, walking on water, and brings them safely to their journey's end. It's interesting, don't you think, that John is pointing out it's not what we take from the table, or from Christ, but what of ourselves we bring to it that makes the difference.

What a breath-taking account. What a challenging Gospel. For it clearly declares the abundance of God's grace in the face of what we proclaim is scarcity. But we're not alone. Jesus is with us. And it's in and through his presence that what we have to bring is transformed. Of course we're called to be realistic and careful. Of course we're called to watch out for things. But we're called beyond stopping the work of God because we presume there is not enough. We're taught that we actually live and exist in a great abundance; an abundance of grace, an abundance of gifts, and an abundance of wealth. In the middle of a scarcity that convinces us to gather our fortunes and our abilities around ourselves if we are to survive, Jesus invites us out of the abundance of grace and gifts and wealth that we have, to bring that to the table. To bring that to him. Of course, what we have is clearly not nearly enough, unless as John would have us understand, unless they're given over to Christ who will be free to use them in his amazing ways – then, and only then will we discover that we actually have much, much more than it takes. That is takes a kid, a kid with five loaves and two fish to prove it. Amen.

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