**Feeding 5000**

**Matthew 14:13-21**

10/5/14

Thought for Meditation:

 “Send the crowds away so that they may go and buy food for themselves” (Mt. 14:15)… I wish I could have seen the expression on the disciples’ faces when they heard the Master’s response. “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

 I think it was a test – not to show them what they couldn’t do, but a test to demonstrate what they could do… When Jesus saw the people, he saw an opportunity to love and affirm value. When the disciples saw the people, they saw thousands of problems. *Max Lucado “In the Eye of the Storm” p46-47.*

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I want to look this morning at the second most important story in the gospels. The crucifixion is obviously the most important story. All four gospels have their version of the cross and the resurrection. There is only one other story that is in all four of the gospels. I read it a few moments ago – the feeding of the five thousand.

 If you look at the passage right before ours, at the beginning of chapter 14, it sets the context. Jesus has just learned some news that was both devastating and threatening. John the Baptist, his cousin, his friend, his partner in ministry, had been killed, brutally murdered by Herod.

 Our passage tells us that when Jesus heard about John’s death he wanted to get away and spend some time alone. We all have moments like that, times when we need some quiet, to reflect and pray, times to get ourselves back together. Jesus got into a boat and crossed over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Unfortunately, people found out where Jesus was going and followed him. When he reached the other side, instead of finding a quiet area where he could be alone, there was a huge crowd. I wonder if he was tempted to get back in the boat and go someplace else. He didn’t do that. He got out of the boat and spent all day with the people; listening their stories, healing those who were sick, loving each person with the love of God.

 At the end of the day the disciples came to Jesus and told him to send everyone away. “Jesus, there is a McDonald’s a couple of miles down the road, and an Eat’n Park right next door. Tell everyone to go get something to eat.” Jesus said that they should feed them right there. The disciples complain that they only have 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. Jesus said, “That’s good enough.” He took the five loaves and the two fish, and fed everyone.

 Matthew tells us that there “were about five thousand men, beside women and children.” In other words, there could have been 10 – 15 thousand people there – fed with five loaves of bread and two fish! This story is so familiar that we forget the shock of the miracle. Let me see if I can help us to get a glimpse of how amazing it really was.

 It is my understanding that after worship today there is a reception. I hope that all of you will come. I’d like to get the chance to meet you. I also heard that there were cookies. I took upon myself to make sure that the cookies were good enough and that there were enough cookies for everyone. ☺ (eat a cookie). Don’t worry, I think there are still two or three cookies left. That should be plenty for all of us. After that we could have lunch together. We have one loaf of bread and a cup of grape juice. If Jesus could feed 10-15 thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish this loaf ought to be able to feed all of us!

 Let me share with you one other idea from this passage that is often overlooked. Matthew tells us that when the people sat down to eat Jesus took the loaves of bread, he blessed them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to feed everyone. When Matthew tells the story in the Upper Room of the first Lord’s Supper, he uses the same words. Jesus took the bread, he blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. In other words, the story of the feeding of the 5000 points to the Lord’s Supper. The feeding of the 5000 reminds us that Jesus is the one who gives us the food that nourishes us physically and spiritually.

 Let me suggest that just as Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it away, he takes us, he blesses us, he breaks us, and gives us away. (5:30)

 Let’s look at each of those. First, Jesus blesses us. The Greek word for bless literally means to speak well of, or to say something good about. It means the same thing as to praise or to celebrate. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.” The word bless is also used to talk about giving thanks. Before a meal we bless the food. We aren’t praising the food as much as we are praising or giving thanks to the one who gave us the food. That’s what the word “bless” means in our passage. Jesus gave thanks to God for the food.

 Henri Nouwen tells the story of a powerful experience of blessing. Henri worked at a center for mentally handicapped adults. One day he was getting ready to lead worship. Janet, one of the members of the community, came up to him and said, “Henri, can you give me a blessing?” Henri was a Roman Catholic priest, so he made the sign of the cross on her forehead. Janet objected. “That doesn’t work. I want a real blessing!” Henri had no idea what she meant so he invited her into worship.

After he led the worship service Henri said to everyone, “Janet has asked for a special blessing.” Janet immediately got up and walked up to him and wrapped her arms around him. Henri had on a long white robe, and as he put her arms around her she almost disappeared underneath the robe. Henri said, “Janet, I want you to know that you are God’s beloved daughter. You are precious in God’s eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to the people in your house, and all the good things you do show us what a beautiful human being you are. I know you feel a little low these days and that there is some sadness in your heart, but I want you to remember who you are: a very special person, deeply loved by God and all the people who are here with you.” When he finished Janet looked up at him and smiled. He knew that Janet had heard and received God’s blessing. Henri went on to bless a number of people who were in the room.

There is something in that story that is very touching. I have a sense that all of us long to know that we are blessed. Here is the good news; all of us are blessed. We have material blessings beyond the imagination of most of the world. We have more than we need of food, clothes, cars, homes, and all sorts of other things. God has blessed us with families and friends, this church. I count it a blessing to be here with you. But above all we have the blessing of God that receives us with open arms. God wraps His arms around us. God holds us and says, “You are precious in my eyes. You are my beloved child.” Believe the good news that in Jesus Christ you are blessed!

Jesus took the bread, blessed it and then he broke it. This bread looks wonderful, but it won’t nourish us unless it is broken and eaten. In the same way, there are times in our lives when we are broken.

My first two churches were in Colorado. We had 13 wonderful years there. Then I took a call as the senior pastor at a church in Ohio. After about a year and a half it was obvious that it wasn’t a good place for me. It is a long story, but I ended up resigning from that church before I had a new call. I thought my ministry was over. I was broken and scared. Who would hire a pastor that was a failure? It was one of the most difficult experiences in my life and I wouldn’t wish that pain on anyone. However, I stand before you today and can tell you that God used that experience and transformed me, and I believe I became a much better pastor.

Sharon Church has gone through a difficult time. I’ve heard bits and pieces of the story and I’m sure I’ll hear more as time goes on. I imagine that in some ways this church feels broken. Being broken is not fun. However, I would remind you that being broken does not mean that God has rejected us or abandoned us. Being broken doesn’t disqualify us from being used by God. God uses our brokenness to share His love, to proclaim God’s faithfulness, and to reflect God’s glory.

Two conductors, maestros, were listening to a young soprano. She gave a wonderful performance and the first maestro was praising her purity and the clarity of her voice. The second maestro agreed. “Yes, she is very good, but she will be even better when her heart has been broken.”

No one likes to be broken, and certainly we don’t need to seek it out. However, when it comes, whether it is the death of a loved one, a divorce, an illness that tears at our bodies, a conflict at work, or whatever, we are called to cling to God. We are called to trust that God is at work and will use our brokenness to share God’s love and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. (13:00)

Jesus took bread. He blessed it, he broke it, and he gave it to the disciples and they gave it to others. God has blessed us and God will break us so that we can be given to others. If the disciples had kept the bread for themselves the people who were there would have been hungry. For the bread to do what it was meant to do, to be what it was meant to be, it had to be given away. For us to do what God wants and to be what God wants us to be we must give what we have received.

 We live in a world that tells us that joy is found in getting. We are fulfilled through the things we accumulate and through the accomplishments of our lives. God’s message is that true joy comes not from getting, but from giving ourselves to others. Joy is found through giving. (14:30)

 Giving certainly includes giving of our money. I haven’t been here long enough to know how the finances are doing here at the church, or what the plans are for stewardship. But giving money is something we need to think about more often than just during a stewardship campaign and budget planning. We are also called to give of our time and our talents. All week, as I’ve been settling into the office, it has been wonderful seeing all the people who have come in to help at the church. Everyone has gifts and talent that God calls us to use in a variety of ways; from singing in the choir to visiting people who are sick, to helping in the office.

 Let me suggest, however, that the greatest gift you can give is yourself. Give your love, your joy, your faith, your friendship. Give a smile to someone. A smile can make a big difference in someone’s day. I don’t know if we have any visitors here today, but if you see someone here who is a visitor give yourself to that person. Welcome him or her and invite them down to the fellowship time. Most of us have probably know John 3:16. “God so loved the world that he gave.” My friends, give yourself to the God who gave himself to you.

Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and give it away. God takes us and blesses us. God will break us. And God wants to give us away, so that the world may know the love of Jesus Christ.