

Trinity 9 2018 John 6: 1-21

The Gospel reading from John 6:1-21 is full of rich imagery. Although the story of the feeding of the 5,000 appears in all four Gospels, John's version has a slightly different meaning. In fact, John includes only seven of Jesus' miracles in his Gospel, and in each miracle the believer is brought closer to God. Each miracle invites us to reflect on what the miracle says about Jesus.

John most likely included this version of the feeding of the 5,000 to provide additional information that was not recorded in the other three Gospels. For the early Christians, this story got to the heart of something they knew was important about Jesus, about who he was, what he was up to, and what he found to be important. John's recording of this miracle showed the creative power of Christ and set the stage for Jesus' talk about the "bread of life" in the remaining verses of Chapter 6. The purpose of John's Gospel is to show that Jesus is the mind of God in human form, so the signs in John's version of the feeding of the 5,000 are designed to show God at work in the lives of his people.

The feeding of the 5,000 represents both the manna that came from heaven while the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years and faith in Jesus. It is also a sign of the Last Supper. It represents the covenant that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is God's provision for the world's salvation.

The barley loaves represented Elisha's feeding of the 100 people with a small supply of barley loaves as mentioned in 2 Kings 4:42-44. Barley bread was a bread of poor quality that was eaten by poor people. Barley loaves were less nutritious, less tasty and harder to digest than bread made with wheat. The small lunch represents the great things God can do with whatever we bring to him, no matter how big or how small. The 12 baskets of leftovers represent both God's abundance (which means that there is enough for everyone) and the 12 tribes of Israel. The crowd's desire to make Jesus an earthly king represents our desire to fit God into our expectations of him instead of fitting ourselves into God's expectations of us. Jesus walking on the water in the midst of the storm represents God in our midst and God coming to us when we are in trouble.

The Bible uses the word "signs" to speak of miracles because God has a special place for miracles. Jesus used his miracles to point people to God, and it was God's power that made Jesus' miracles possible. In other words, Jesus opened

the people's eyes to see and their hearts to believe, but the people in the crowd only saw Jesus as a provider for their earthly needs. They did not see the signs as indications that God would provide for their heavenly needs and their spiritual needs. Jesus wanted the people to live in him and partake of his spiritual food, but the people wanted Jesus to stay with them so they could continue to enjoy the physical food that he offered.

In order to make room for the spiritual food Jesus offers, we must starve our human weaknesses such as judging, indifference and isolation and feed on kindness, compassion, community and generosity. In other words, we must feed on the characteristics of Jesus in order to become more like him. The crowd did not understand what was happening. They got their stomachs full, but their spirits were still hungry. They did not realize that if they accepted the spiritual food Jesus offered, they would never be spiritually hungry again.

The disciples learned at first hand that God is greater than the needs of 5,000 people, and this gave them confidence that they could trust him for their daily needs. At times God will set a seemingly impossible task before us to test us and see whether we react in fear or faith. That is because He is training us to have faith in Him and trusting Him means looking beyond what we can see and do to what He is able to accomplish, especially when he works through us. We can trust God in the storms of life. Faith is the key to the storehouse of God's ample supply. When we believe in God, we will have rest and peace in our lives. In spite of opposition, Jesus will enable his people to achieve the goals he has set for them and this also includes salvation.

John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher of the 18th century, once said,

“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth”.

Can you imagine what would happen if every believer took that advice to heart? We are not perfect, but God uses imperfect people to do his perfect work in our world. In fact, he seems to go out of his way to find imperfect people to work through. Just look at Moses, David, and Samson, to name just a few.

Moses was a stutterer who murdered an Egyptian, but God used him to free the

Israelites from slavery. David was an ordinary shepherd boy who was used by God to lead the Israelites to greatness and prosperity, in spite of committing adultery and murder. Samson was used to destroy the Philistines in spite of giving in to temptation by having his hair cut. If God can use people like them to do great things, just imagine what he can do through us if we let him?

God makes the impossible in our lives possible when we act on His word and trust Him for what only He can do. As the old hymn says, "It is no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, he'll do for you".

Amen.