

Ephesians 3:14-21 (p. 948)
John 6:1-21 (P. 865)

July 25, 2021
Blaine Christian Church

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, we do not live on bread alone. Let the heavenly food of the scripture we are about to hear nourish us today in the ways of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen

“The Rest of the Story”

Last week, Pastor Bob left us with a wonderful sermon that truly challenged us and our desires as Christians. As he spoke about last week’s passages, Pastor Bob kind of set me up for this week...do you remember Bob saying something to the effect of “The feeding of five thousand, that miracle actually happens between the verses of today’s readings would have been easier to preach on.” So here I am today, preaching on those in between passages. If that isn’t a set-up for a new preacher, I don’t know what is.

The story within today’s Gospel reading, the Feeding of 5000, is one that is in the memory banks of many who attended Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. It has been repeated over and over again. Did you know that within the four Gospels there are very few stories that are repeated by each author? Some of these stories include: Jesus’s baptism, Jesus leaving Judea to go to Galilee, Jesus returning from Galilee to preach, and the transfiguration of Jesus. But, in terms of miracles, the feeding of 5000 is the only miracle told in all four of the Gospels.

At face value this story is simply amazing. I am not sure how many of you attended the fireworks in Frankfort on the 4th of July. Sue and I did and, being new to the area, we were amazed by the size of the crowd. It was estimated that approximately 5000 people were in attendance. As I consider the expanse of the crowd on the beach and how much food it would have taken to feed everyone, the ability to feed this many people is astounding. To take five barley loaves and two fish and distribute the food to 5000 men, not to mention the possibility of another 5000-10000 women and children, it is a feat that is nothing short of a God-given miracle.

Jesus' ability to perform miracles and to care for His family gives us a lot to think about so let's consider some of the deeper meaning behind the story and give some focus to what else we can learn from, as Paul Harvey would say, "the rest of the story."

One of the first items that we should note about the feeding of the 5000 is the way it mirrors another event in Biblical history. The Gospel of John tells us in verse four, "The Jewish Passover was near." This points to the teachings of Moses. When we consider the feeding of five thousand, we can see that several parts of the story are comparable to the Exodus.

- The obvious comparison is that Jesus and the disciples just crossed a lake and were followed by a multitude of hungry people. Moses went through the Red Sea and fed a huge gathering with manna from the heavens.
- John 6:6 has Philip providing a test "Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat." In Exodus, we find the people grumbling, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3).
- Just as the Israelites were commanded to only gather what they needed because God would provide for next day and to not waste any manna by trying to save it for the morning (Exodus 16:19), Jesus tells the disciples to "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted" (John 6:12)

So, why is it important to note the correlation between the Exodus story (including Passover) and the Feeding of 5000? We need to look back in the Gospel of John just a little bit more to understand the lesson that Jesus was teaching. At the end of verse 5, Jesus is pointing to the shallow understanding that the Israelites have concerning the teaching of Moses. Let me read it for you:

John 5:45-47- **But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?**

Jesus continues pointing to the teachings of the Old Testament when He says, "**Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from**

heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the Bread of God is the Bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33). Jesus is making the point very clear to them in that just as their ancestors had eaten manna in the wilderness, God’s gift of food from heaven, now He, as God’s Son and part of the Trinity, was providing bread for the people. But don’t stop there! Because Jesus keeps going with what may be the main focus of the New Testament, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). Jesus fed the 5000 through a miracle by changing five barley loaves into enough food for everyone.

This leads us to our second “rest of the story” revelation: the Feeding of 5000 was representative of an act that is a central point to our church’s history and weekly observances: the Lord’s Table. Every week we come to the table and we hear the Words of Institution: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it...” That sounds a lot like “Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed it.” (John 6:11).

This theme of the Eucharist was important to Jesus as he wanted to point to the real reason he had come to earth to be a human, a point that was missed time and again by all of his followers, including the disciples. Within today’s passage, we find a major issue. As many of the men in the Men’s Bible Study will tell you, the Jews mistook Jesus for a different type of Messiah. You see, the Jews were looking for a living, breathing, head knocking, sword wielding, all-powerful earthly king. Jesus recognized this. Let’s look at verses 14-15: After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”

The Jews wanted a king to overthrow the Roman government. This idea is repeated over and over again in the New Testament. Look at the brothers James and John. They approached Jesus and ask Jesus to “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” They wanted to be in the throne room of king David’s castle sitting next to Jesus as he rules over the nation of Israel. Think about the royal entrance that the Jews gives Jesus as He enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The people are laying palm branches on the ground...it’s like rolling out

the red carpet. Even Peter, the Rock that Jesus will build his church on, gets into the act. First, Peter states that he will never disown Jesus, we know how that ends, three denials. The next morning, he grabs a sword and cuts off the ear of “the servant to the high priest” (Matthew 26:51).

The Jews knew their history and Moses was their leader. Moses led a rebellion that took the Jews out of Egypt and eventually into the promised land. The Jews knew this history, so they wanted Jesus to lead a rebellion to free them from the bondage of the Roman government.

As people with 20/20 historical vision, it is easy to see the mistakes of the disciples and the Jewish people. We can see that they didn't understand the directions of the prophets predicting Jesus' coming and that they would destroy the Temple, that is crucify Jesus, and that the Temple would be raised in three days. Even when Jesus clearly told them this fact, they still would not let go of their earthly desires to support His Heavenly purpose. It is easy for me to judge them in this moment.

But I wonder, if I could let go of my earthly desires to vote for Jesus in a Presidential election. Let's just say I am a democrat and Jesus was a republican, could I let go of my liberal beliefs to vote for Jesus. Flip that, if I am a republican would I ever consider reaching across the boundary of my conservative roots to vote for a Jesus who is a democrat. Or worse yet, could I throw my vote away and vote for a Man who is running as an independent because he has no desire to tie himself to a party that defines themselves by political statements based on social issues or financial desires. You see, I can't blame the disciples or the Jews for mistaking the real purpose of Jesus, because I would have done the same thing at that point and, you know what, I would probably still do it today.

Here's the deal. Jesus could not become an earthly king because that would have limited his scope of power to the nation of Israel. God's plan through the actions of Jesus was to touch the entire world. Jesus isn't asking that you put up a flag in your front yard to show your support, in fact, that would be wrong in His eyes as it would turn to an idol. You see, Jesus came, not to be an earthly ruler, but a king who would rule in our hearts and minds. This only happens when we turn to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith and commit our lives to Him. In Luke, this is

what Jesus meant when he said, “The kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21).

Jesus came for one purpose, that was to give himself as a sacrifice that we celebrate at the Lord’s Table. The feeding of the 5000 gives us an example of the breaking of bread and the gift that comes with approaching the table to receive His gift. The feeding “miracle” was no small feat, in fact it was a visible sign of God’s power on earth as Jesus completed the task. This is a sign or a window that gives us a peek in to the glory of God present in this world through Jesus. As we approach the table today, we have this same opportunity to be fed.

Our next, “rest of the story” piece of information is related to how radical Jesus was in presenting a meal to the 5000, treating each of the guests as equals. This was not the Jewish tradition! In fact, meals were times to separate social classes and the Jews did not eat with those of lower classes. Meals were restricted by national boundaries, political boundaries, ideological boundaries...you get the idea, you just didn’t sit down with strangers and have a meal. But Jesus was different. He told the disciples to have everyone sit down and eat together. Jesus didn’t separate the rich from the poor, the Sadducees from the Pharisees, the tax collectors from the religious leaders, the white from the black...He made the meal completely inclusive of all who were in attendance. Jesus offered that meal to everyone with no bias. As Jesus fed the 5000 on shore of the Sea of Galilee, he wasn’t concerned with their bank account, cultural background, color of skin, social beliefs, number of devotions they did each day, or any other defining point. He simply said come and eat. Jesus didn’t and still does not observe our earthly barriers that separate people from sharing a meal. He simply looks to everyone and says “come to Me and eat the bread of life.” To Jesus you are not defined by any of our earthly categories, you are simply His beloved and you are fully welcome to share at His Table.

Now I’d like to offer another theory some people have regarding the feeding of 5000. I want to preface this thought with the fact that I truly believe Jesus used five loaves of barley bread and two fish to feed the masses. He didn’t have or need any other help. With that said, there is a theory that the gift of five loaves and two fish actually fed the masses when everyone present conveniently took out what

they had brought and shared it with others on that day. Not only did everyone get fed, but then there were 12 baskets of bread left over. There is a part of me that really likes this theory. Can you imagine 5000 men becoming completely generous in a moment. Maybe changing the hearts of 5000 men to give of their bounty is more of a miracle than multiplying five loaves and two fish into enough food for everyone to eat.

Just think if that miracle happened today right here in Benzie County. Maybe it is already taking place. We have an organization in Benzie County called BACN: Benzie Area Christian Neighbors. BACN has been raising funds to build a new facility to better meet the needs of the neighbors who come to receive food, clothing, and other forms of assistance. The new building will cost about 3.5 million dollars and the organization has been given 1.4 million in grants. Over the past year and a half, the organization has raised 1.7 million in private donations but they still need about \$400,000 to complete the project. As I look at the wealth in America, I wonder what would happen if the miracle of giving bread to a neighbor was transformed to changing our hearts to provide for the needs of neighbors today. I don't believe there would be an issue of raising \$400,000, in fact there would probably be an excess of 12 baskets left over. If you are interested in helping BACN, there will Campaign Kick-Off on July 26th from 5-7 pm at the present BACN building on US-31.

Getting back to the Feeding of the 5000. One of the notable aspects of the story is the fact that 12 baskets of bread were left over. You can look at the leftovers with an eye on several concepts. The first would be that Jesus has 12 disciples and in this case 12 who are serving Him. The 12 baskets of bread allow each of the servers to be abundantly cared for in their own hunger, just as He will provide for those who serve Him today. A second view is that there were 12 tribes of Israel that needed to be fed. The twelve baskets represent the need to take the Message of the Bread of Life through Jesus to the 12 tribes. You might note that the feeding of another 4000 on a different occasion, that is told about in both the gospels of Matthew and Mark had seven baskets of bread left over which could represent the seven regions of Gentiles present in that area.

As we consider the meaning of the leftovers, the reality is that there are more people that still need to be fed the Bread of Life today. Jesus provides for each of

our needs in abundance. We are not to be wasteful and we are called to share that Bread of Life, which is the message of Jesus, with all who are hungry.

And all God's People Said...

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, feed us. Give us the bread of life that we need so badly to be filled now and throughout eternity. We know that you provide in abundance for us and that there are baskets of bread left over. Give us the courage and strength to take our abundance into the world to serve as Your hands and feet allowing your Gospel to be spread with our neighbors, within our county, throughout our state and country and to all the ends of the earth.

We thank You for the fellowship of our fellow believers. We care about each other and we attempt to bear each other's burdens and concerns, and we want help to uplift and be a blessing to each other. There are those here with us this morning that have problems, difficulties and burdens that they're carrying. They came to church today hoping to hear some word or to experience some special moving of Your Spirit that will give encouragement. Let them know that they aren't forsaken nor forgotten. Be to them just exactly what they need right now as they reach out to You for Your touch.

Lord, we ask that you be with ...

Please calm their hearts and free their minds. Please heal their bodies and their lives as well. Lord, we ask a special blessing be placed on Pastor Bob and Deb as they begin their Sabbatical. Allow this to be a time of renewal, rejoicing and rejuvenation. Strengthen them through Your Holy Spirit and guide them throughout their learning and travels.

Father in Heaven, we know that You answer prayers in your way and in your time. Help us to release our anxiety for these concerns to You this day. Guide us in our walk with your Son and help to pray as He taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father...