

SERMON TEXT FOR PROPER 13A

PREACHED AUGUST 5, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXT: MATTHEW 14.13-21, Isaiah 55.1-5, Romans 9.1-5, Psalm 145.8-9,14-21

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people." As a result of Jesus' ministry, **large crowds** followed him. In today's gospel lesson, Jesus once again leaves the crowd and takes **refuge** in a boat, and once again the **crowds follow him**.

As Matthew records this story, Jesus had just heard that his cousin, **John** (the Baptist), had been **beheaded** at Herod's dinner party. So Jesus felt the need to **withdraw** from the crowd to a solitary place. Perhaps he needed to **grieve the loss** of his family member. Perhaps he was contemplating what John's **death** would mean for his own ministry. In any case, Jesus was **withdrawing from** the crowd, not looking to **gather** one. **But his need for solitude was interrupted by the crowd's need to see and be with him.**

So despite Jesus' attempt for some **down time**, *"When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick."* Then, as the day wore on, it became clear - at least to Jesus' disciples - that **something must be done to feed the crowd**. But what to do?

In the training manual for Ritz-Carlton Hotel employees, there's a maxim that says, "If you see a problem, **you own it**." To say "It's not **my problem**" or "It's not **my job**" is **not acceptable**. **If you see a problem, you own it** – you take responsibility. Jesus used this maxim on his **disciples**, as they came to him with the request to send the crowds away to neighboring villages to *"buy food for themselves."*

"You give them something to eat," Jesus countered.

"We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish," the disciples replied. How is **that** going to feed such a large crowd? They were **right**, of course - under **normal circumstances**. You see, **they** were thinking **scarcity**, but Jesus was thinking **abundance**. Clearly, they **underestimated** their **resources** - and they clearly underestimated their **master**.

Jesus **took** the five loaves and the two fish and **blessed** them, and when they were **distributed** among the people **there was more than enough** – an **abundance** even. *"And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full."* Five thousand men, plus women and children, were fed - **plus leftovers** - from those meager ingredients. (I've often wondered what happened to those leftovers.....)

Through this miracle, Jesus taught the disciples a **different kind of math**, based not on **addition** but on **multiplication**. He taught them the importance

of seeing the **world's** problems as **our** problems, and taking **action** to solve them. And he taught them the importance of **compassion** – caring for the **least** of these in our midst.

So if Jesus can so easily feed the **multitudes** – if this kind of miracle is possible - **why are there still so many hungry people in the world today?** Why is there still a need for **us** to feed the hungry? According to The World Food Program, approximately **795 million** people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy, active life. That is about **one in nine** people on earth. In a world where we produce enough food to feed everyone, one in nine people **still go to bed on an empty stomach each night**. Even more, **one in three** suffer from some form of **malnutrition**. In the US, research from the Department of Agriculture found that about **1 in 5** American households are **food insecure**.

Eradicating hunger and malnutrition is one of the great **challenges** of our time. The consequences of not **enough** – or the **wrong** – food cause chronic illness and disease, underdevelopment, physical and psychological health problems. And, as you can imagine, it is difficult, if not **impossible**, for a hungry child to focus in school.

So, what are we as Christians doing to feed the hungry?

- Many churches offer **food pantries** and provide meals to those in need.
- They/we are giving to **global programs** like ELCA World Hunger or Bread for the World or, more **locally**, the Central PA Food Bank
- Both churches and families are **planting gardens** and giving (excess) crops to food banks. That is a really good way for low income families to have access to fresh produce.
- On a **political** level, we can advocate for and support programs that feed the hungry and provide adequate, affordable **healthcare** for all.

Sometimes, all it takes is **one person** to make a difference in a community. In Columbia, Lancaster County, **one woman** decided that school-age children **shouldn't have to hungry** when schools were not in session. This is a small school district in which **every school student receives free meals** because of the poverty level of residents in the borough. Six years ago, she began collecting **volunteers** and **donations**, contacting **government** agencies and area **service** and **veterans** organizations, to start a program that would feed children under 18 during the summer months. Now in its **6th** year of operation, the Summer Food Service Program feeds upwards of **200 children** every day for **11 weeks** of the summer at **eight sites** in and around Columbia. That's about **1000** meals a week, close to **10,000** for the summer - all on a budget of less than **\$45,000** with one full-time and 10 part-time employees working with close to 100 volunteers.

Jesus said to the disciples - as he says to **us** - *"They need not go away; you give them something to eat."* Rather than giving one more **excuse** for why we can't find a **solution** to the problem of hunger - or any of the world's other problems - Jesus invites us instead to **take inventory**. **What do we have to offer? More than we think**, I suspect. If Jesus can feed 5,000+ people with the equivalent of an **appetizer**, then **multiplying us and our resources** to feed the whole world should be no problem at all.

We are called to **reach out and share** all that God has given us, even though sometimes we feel that we have **little** to share. Certainly no **offering** of our time, our talent or our treasure is **too small** or **insignificant** for God's use. Because just as Jesus made something **huge** out of meager amounts of food - perhaps equivalent to the yield from a tiny **mustard seed** - God takes our often meager gifts and offerings and **multiplies** them into something great.

So what if, rather than **fretting** about whether we **have enough**, we simply **give thanks** for what we have, **put it to use** for those around us, and see **just how far** God might **stretch** and, indeed, **multiply** it? **God is still at work here, my people**. **We** are enough. **You** are enough. **God is not done doing good to us and for us and through us**. AMEN