

“Partners with God”

Matthew 14:13-21 August 2, 2020

Fairfield Grace UMC

The feeding of five thousand people is one of the most well-known stories of Jesus. Jesus fed more than 20,000 people, including women and children with 5 loaves and 2 fish. What a miraculous achievement!

But it is more than a story of the miracle Jesus performed.

Let's see this story in context.

The verse 13 reads, “Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew ... to a lonely place apart ... When the crowds heard it, they followed him ... from the towns.” Well, what was this which Jesus had heard about?

The first part of the chapter tells about this news, that is John the Baptist was dead. King Herod had ordered him beheaded in jail and John's disciples had buried his headless body.

From childhood, Jesus and John had been close. Their mothers, Mary and Elizabeth were cousins. John had become a prophetic preacher of righteousness and justice in the wilderness. As Jesus had begun his own ministry, it had been John who had presented him to the people and baptized him at the Jordan River. Now John, his beloved cousin and friend was dead.

Imagine the despair in which Jesus must have been. He must have been in shock and grief and in a sad time of deep discouragement.

So what did Jesus do? “He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.” (v. 13), taking his disciples with him.

Why? Surely Jesus needed a time to grieve over the death of John the Baptist. So did his disciples. You know some of Jesus' disciples had been John's disciples before following Jesus. They, both Jesus and his disciples needed a time to grieve.

Now note carefully what happened there in that "solitary place" that day. As people heard about Jesus and his disciples went to that “solitary place,” they came from the whole surrounding country to meet Jesus.

Jesus saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Responding to the disciples' concern for the multitude, Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." But they were unable to do this, saying, "We have only five loaves and two fish." Paraphrasing this conversation, Jesus said to his disciples, "You feed the people" and they replied, "We don't have what it takes."

Jesus saw this occasion as a teaching opportunity. He did not let the opportunity go. He often taught in parables, telling stories. But this time he was about to teach through a parable of a different kind, a parable of action.

So he asked them, "bring those loaves and fish to me." "Bring them to me." They brought the loaves and the fish and Jesus blessed them. And what next? He gave them back to his disciples! He handed them right back to the disciples who brought them, saying: Now, you give these to the people.

They did so as they were instructed. And guess what. All the people, including women and children were fed well.

The disciples must have been utterly amazed at what happened there. "What has happened here?" "Wow. Wow. I cannot believe this!" "What is the meaning of this?" they must have said to one another. "What we thought we could not do has been done. The people we could not feed have been fed. The Master did it miraculously." The disciples saw and experienced Jesus' power, his power to make the impossible possible. A sense of excitement and hope arose in their midst.

Yes, Jesus did not feed them with five loaves and two fish just to show how powerful and how able he is. He fed them to offer his disciples a sense of hope and encouragement and also to let them know, "We are partners. We can do it together. It is not my solo work. You and I did it together."

Remember, that it was the disciples who brought to Jesus five loaves and two fish. Jesus did not feed the crowd; Jesus handed five loaves and two fish to his disciples. It was from their hands those people received their dinner meal that day.

Who are we?

The Apostle Paul is right when he writes of God's people "as workers together with him." (2 Corinthians 6:1) We are partners with God.

Historically, God has always worked with people, and through people, to get things done in the world. Surely we believe God could get his work done without involving his people in his work, but God rarely does.

A country preacher came upon a member of his parish working in his newly-made garden alongside the road. With an air of great piousness, the preacher said, "Brother William, you ought to be very grateful to God for all the beautiful tomatoes and potatoes and beans the Lord will give you in your garden this year." Glancing up and down along neat rows of planted vegetables, Brother William slowly replied, "Yes, Pastor, I suppose so, but, you know, you really should have seen this patch of ground last year when the Lord had it all by himself.

The plain fact is that wherever God has done things in the world, somebody has been there helping God do them. The Bible tells clearly how God has taken his people into partnership with Him.

When God wanted to spare a few people who were righteous, God called the man Noah and said, "PREPARE an ark."

When God wanted to begin saving the human family, God said to the man Abraham, "GET OUT of your own country and immigrate to a land that I will show you."

When God wanted to get his slave people out of Egypt, God stopped the man Moses in front of the burning bush and said to him, "GO DOWN and lead my people out."

When God wanted to construct a temple in Jerusalem, he spoke to the man, Solomon, saying, "BUILD me a house."

When God wanted to strengthen and encourage his people in Babylonian exile, he called the man Ezekiel, and said, "SPEAK to this people."

When God wanted to share the good news of Jesus Christ, he commanded his disciples to "GO and MAKE disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Did you hear those action words God spoke? Prepare - Get out - Go down - Build - Speak – Go and Make!

To his people, God was saying: Bring what you have, do what you can, and together we shall do something good and better for the world.

“Bring your 5 loaves and 2 fish to me.”

You might say, “there isn't much that I can bring, there isn't much I can do, my talents are meager, my resources few, my time short and my talent not special. I don't see anything good can come out of it.”

Well, be reminded this is precisely what those 1st century disciples thought when they brought to Jesus their five loaves and two fish. But they did bring them - this is the important thing: they did bring those loaves and fish. And they were surprised.

And we may be too - when we bring what we've got, however small and meager, into a partnership with God, and we will be amazed to discover how really great they can be.

An old saying says, "Without God we cannot; without us God will not."

How true it is.

Who are we? We are God's partners. Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.