

Meeting Needs with God's Love

John 6:1-21

July 29 and 30, 2006

Today's Gospel begins with Jesus moving.

“Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.”

Our family has had the opportunity to travel quite a bit lately.

We had a great trip with the youth

to the ELCA National Youth Gathering in San Antonio.

And then, last weekend, we went to a family reunion in Dannebrog, Nebraska.

Now we're getting ready to visit my brother and his family
in Minnesota next week.

All fun stuff.

But do you ever get back from trips like that
and feel like you need a vacation
because you're worn out from vacation?

When we got back from San Antonio,

we arrived here at church about 5:30 in the morning.

Needless to say,

I didn't get much done that day.

When we got back from the family reunion,

I took the rest of the day to recuperate.

And these were fun trips.

In the events leading up to today's Gospel reading,

Jesus had been busy teaching and healing.

The Jewish leaders have been persecuting him.

And now he crosses the Sea of Galilee.

You'd think he'd get a break.

But what happens?

A large crowd kept following him,

because he was healing the sick.

And Jesus and his disciples

had just sat down.

And here come the people.

Now, if it was me,
I might have tried to hide behind a rock.
Or maybe tried to make a break for it
and see if I could outrun the crowd.
Get some space.
But Jesus and his disciples don't run away.
Jesus has compassion on the people.
And without the people asking him a thing.
Without them telling them they were hungry.
Without them begging him to help them,
Jesus says to Philip:

**“Where are we to buy bread
for these people to eat?”**

Now, Jesus already knew what was going to happen.
But Philip doesn't.
And Philip gets out his little pocket calculator.
And he says,
“Let's see,
based on the size of that dust cloud they're kicking up,
factored into the distance away.
There must be 5,000 or more.
To feed that many people,
well—let's see.
A little bread,
a little meat.
What am I thinking?
We don't have that kind of money.”

Jesus (Philip said),
just to give them each a little bit
would cost,
oh, maybe 200 denarii.
That's like 6 months' wages.
We can't afford that.”

What is your family income for a year?
Figure half of that.
That's roughly what we're talking.

Andrew must have thought the same thing.

There's no way to feed this crowd.
But he'd been out scouting for food.
Maybe there was a caterer out there somewhere.
But all he'd found was one little boy,
with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish.
I guess wheat was the preferred grain for bread.
But if you couldn't afford that,
you used barley.
So, this was not a luxurious lunch.
This was sustenance.

Andrew reported to Jesus:

**“There is a boy here with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish.
But what are they among so many people.”**

Which, I have to say,
is a very logical and reasoned report.

But what did Jesus say?

He said:

“Make the people sit down.”

And Jesus takes 5 barley and 2 fish.

And what does he do?

Does he grumble to God because there's so little food?
Does he complain that no one thought to bring food along?
Does he start worrying about what the crowd's going to do
when they find out there isn't anything to eat?
Does he get out his sharpest knife,
so he can cut each loaf of bread
into more than 1000 pieces,
so everyone gets a little?

No.

What does he do?

He gives thanks.

He says a prayer of thanksgiving.
He blesses the food.
He says grace.

And then he starts handing out food.
Can you imagine the boy who brought the loaves and fishes
going home to tell Grandma all about this.

“Grandma,
you’ll never believe what happened today.
I took those 5 loaves and 2 fish you gave me.
And I gave them away.”

“You did what?
You gave away my food?”

“Yeah.
I gave them to this man Jesus.
And he fed this big crowd of people
with just our food.
They said there were 5000 people there.”

“Uh-huh.
And what else happened?”

“Well,
when we were all done
and everyone was full.
They gathered the leftovers.
I guess they didn’t want to waste anything.
And you know how much was left over.
12 baskets.
That’s right.
12 baskets.”

“Now, now.
Don’t you tell me stories.
5 loaves and 2 fish wouldn’t fill 12 baskets
to start with.”

“You’re right, Grandma.
But I’m not making this up.
It really happened.
There were 12 baskets left over.
Ask anybody.
They’ll tell you the same thing.”

“Well, if that’s the way it happened,
it’s something really special.
It’s gotta be a miracle.
And if this Jesus did this miracle,
he might just be the prophet we’ve been waiting for.
Could it be?
Could it really be the Messiah?”

Could it?
Could it be the Messiah?

You know, in a way,
there are 2 miracles here.
One is the miracle of Jesus making that food
feed all those people.
And the other is a more everyday miracle.
It’s the miracle of a boy who shared.

First, Jesus’ miracle.
Some of us have heard this story
over and over again
ever since we were this tall.
So we sometimes miss it.
But there’s something special here.

This is a miracle of God’s love and care for God’s people.
Abundant love.
A love where you can’t measure the
breadth and length and height and depth.
A love that is beyond our understanding.

Jesus showed through his actions
what God is like all the time.
God is the kind of God who would do something
like feed 5000 people.
5000 people who haven't even had a chance to ask for food.
God is a God of compassion.
God is a God who takes care of our needs.
Jesus fed the 5000,
until they were full,
and there were leftovers.
And Jesus showed them and shows us that:
God not only takes care of you.
God gives to you in abundance

Matthew, chapter 6, tells us:

**“Why worry about what you eat or what you wear?
Don't worry about these things
because your heavenly Father knows
that you need these things...”**
...and God will provide.

God gives us life
and gives us abundantly.

So this miracle wasn't just a miracle
for those 5000 who were there that day.
This is a miracle for you and for me.
This is a miracle that shows us something special
about God.
God cares for you.
God provides for you—
—abundantly.

And the second miracle that day,
was the miracle of that little boy's generosity.
What that boy did that day
is a beautiful example of what God asks of you.
Think about the boy.
He brought his lunch.

Maybe enough to share with a brother or sister.
And what did he do with that lunch?
He gave it away.
He gave it all away.

He didn't say to Jesus:
"I have 5 loaves and 2 fish.
When I'm done, you can have the rest."

He didn't say to Jesus,
"I have 5 loaves and 2 fish.
I have food.
You need food.
Let's make a deal.
Show me the money."

He didn't say to Jesus:
"I have 5 loaves and 2 fish.
I'll give you 10%.
That's what we've worked out, isn't it.
Let's see,
that's ½ a loaf of bread
and 1/5 of a fish."

That's not what the boy said.
What the boy said was this:
"Here's everything I have
for you to use."

The boy gave everything to Jesus.
And as part of the crowd,
the boy had plenty to eat.
He gave his all
and God provided for him.

That's what God calls you and me to do.
God calls us to give everything,
knowing that God will provide.

So this story tells us something about God
and something about us.

It tells us that God provides everything we need
and God gives to us abundantly.

And it tells us,
that as followers of Jesus,
we are to give everything to God–
–our time
–our talents
–our possessions
–our energy
–our lives.

And God will take care of all our needs.

May God bless your giving
and your receiving.

In Jesus' name,
Amen