

“Called to Eat, Called to Share”

Mark 6:30-44

Sunday, February 4, 2018

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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Over the past several weeks, we've been focusing on the call of God. The call of God came to Samuel, to speak boldly about political and religious corruption. It came to Jonah, to speak God's word and be an instrument of mercy. And the call of God came to Matthias, by chance. The call came to the first disciples, who were fishermen. Jesus proclaimed the new reality of the Kingdom and called them to leave their nets behind, to follow him and to fish for people.

After calling them together, Jesus sent them out on a mission.

There are two terms used for the people that Jesus called: the most common term is disciple. A disciple is a follower. The other term is apostle, and an apostle is one who is sent out. Both terms are used in Mark 6, our reading for today.

Earlier in Mark chapter 6, Jesus has sent out the...apostles, who are called to continue the work that Jesus began: healing and proclaiming the Good News of God's love. Then Jesus calls the disciples back together, for a time of rest and renewal.

This is the movement of the Christian life. Coming together to be renewed and re-energized, and going forth to serve and make a difference. Disciples follow Jesus. Apostles sent by Jesus. Together to learn, sent to live.

The reading about the feeding of the 5,000 reminds us of these two dynamics in the Christian life, which we enact week after week. We come together to rest and renewed as disciples, and we are encouraged to go into our daily living as apostles, as ones sent with a purpose, to share God's love.

This is sort of what we do, week after week. We gather together for worship, Bible study, fellowship, and rest, and then we're ready to go out and be God's people in the world.

The gospel reading also reminds us that both physical and spiritual needs are important. Some Christians focus only on one and ignore the other. We need both.

As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Five thousand people! It says men, and maybe that includes women and children, but maybe not so it might be more than 5,000 people. All of them are fed, from five loaves of bread and two fish. A miracle indeed.

A natural question arises: How? How did this happen?

I see two possibilities to understand the feeding of the 5,000.

One is that Jesus miraculously multiplied the food. A genuine miracle. If indeed he had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead and heal other sick people, it seems reasonable that he could multiply some loaves and fishes.

The other understanding of the feeding of the 5,000 is that Jesus encouraged people to share.

When we read between the lines, it seems that this is quite possible.

When the disciples come to him worried about the crowds, he says point blank to the disciples “you give them something to eat.” So maybe they looked in their backpacks and purses and realized that they did have some food to share.

And there is one intriguing detail in this gospel reading that makes it more plausible that people would want to share. The text says that the people were organized in groups of 100 and 50. A huge crowd of 5,000 men would seem overwhelming and make people feel like there are too many mouths to feed. People would say, “There is nothing I can do with this huge problem.”

But making it smaller, more personal, giving people eye to eye contact, makes it easier to care, and share, and love your neighbor.

In the church I served in Richmond VA, we did mission trips to Honduras just about every year, with teens and adults. One family had all three of their teens go. In 1998 Hurricane Mitch ravaged Honduras, causing catastrophic damage, and killing thousands of people. I saw the mother of those three teens at church shortly after news of the hurricane, and she had tears in her eye, saying “I feel like I know these people.”

When we see other people face to face, as humans just like us, we become more caring and compassionate. And we realize that we can share what we have.

So if indeed the real miracle in the feeding of the 5,000 was getting people to share, then what Jesus seems to be saying is “there is enough.” And given that they had so much leftover (12 baskets!), Jesus is saying “there is more than enough.”

Jesus helped the disciples move from fear of scarcity, to rejoicing in abundance.

Are you living with a theology of scarcity or a theology of enough?

It seems to me that the Bible tells us that God provides enough, more than enough. On the forty-year journey through the wilderness, God provided enough manna for the Israelites for every day.

Psalm 107:9 reads “For God satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.”

Jesus has his followers pray “give us this day our daily bread.” And he teaches his followers: “See ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given unto you.”

I know I’m not the only person in this sanctuary today he realizes that I have more than enough. More than enough clothes, food, stuff, money... I have plenty.

So when I hear Jesus saying “You give them something to eat” it makes me realize I need to share, especially as I look around at our hungry world.

I have two teenage boys, and they eat a fair amount. I can’t imagine what it would be like to tell them that I didn’t have any food to give them.

For those of us who have three meals a day and plenty of snacks in between, it’s hard to remember that there are hungry people in the world and even in our state and city.

But we are learning the call of the gospel, the call to share.

I see this sharing happening at Covenant, as together we are learning that God has provided more than enough so that we can share with our hungry neighbors.

I see it happening with Heifer, which we celebrate today. Over 25 years, we have provided over \$70,000 to fight hunger and poverty across the world.

I see sharing happening with The River Food Pantry, which we support with volunteers and funds, and with Glenn Stephens Elementary which we support with a healthy snack each month.

I see it happening with special offerings, like our Christmas Eve offering this year, where every penny and every \$100 bill and everything in between went to feed hungry people in South Sudan, through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. We were able to send almost \$4,000 to support food ministry in South Sudan.

God provides enough, so we can share.

One more example. We started this past year, with a projected budget deficit of \$50,000 on our million-dollar budget. And this caused understandable concern. All year my prayer was for God to give this church what we need to do what God wants us to do.

We just closed the books this past week, and instead of a \$50,000 deficit, we had a \$7,000 budget surplus. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God for enough, and even more.

We are blessed to be a blessing. And I'm hoping we can become more generous, sharing more, being more of a blessing.

Today we gather at the communion table, where we are called and invited to share a meal, with little tiny pieces of bread and little tiny cups of juice. But this tiny little meal is enough to give us what we need for our daily living, so we can share God's love with the world.