

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

GOSPEL JOHN 6:1-21

¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ²A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

¹⁵When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

Our Little Loaves

July 29, 2018

A minister was making a home visit to one of the younger families in his parish. A five-year-old boy answered the front door and told the minister his mother would be there shortly. To make some conversation, the minister asked the little guy what he would like to be when he grows up. The boy immediately answered, "I'd like to be possible." "What do you mean by that?" the puzzled minister asked. "Well, you see," the boy replied, "just about every day my mom tells me I'm impossible!" I think I used to be that kid!

I couldn't help but laugh about that when thinking about our story this morning. As I watch the news and hear the stories that seem to divide more than unite; as I see the great needs for the hungry and the homeless; as I see repeated acts of injustice towards all types of people; as I think about our calling to help and feed and comfort

those who are without hope; I find myself feeling an overwhelming sense of “Impossible.” Maybe you feel the same way at times? And yet Jesus continues to ask us to consider the impossible in our lives and this morning’s story is no different.

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is one that occurs in all four of the Gospels. It is an important story for the people, and for us, and while each writer presents it a little differently the content is the same. There are many ways to interpret this story. Some believe that we should accept it as the miracle that it is. That Jesus took the bread and fish and just made more. Nothing wrong with that understanding. However it does create some tension for us if we consider that this is a miracle Jesus flatly refused to do when tempted in the wilderness. Turning stones into bread was not what he was about. Seeking equality with God was not his mission.

And this may very well be the striking difference between the synoptic gospels and John’s gospel. In the synoptic gospels Jesus heals and performs miracles but he does them quietly and often reluctantly. He doesn’t use them to make people believe in him or convince them that he is the Messiah. In fact he usually tells people to not mention any of it. In John’s gospel the emphasis is different. In John’s gospel Jesus performs miracles for the purpose of proving who he is. He does these things so that you might believe he is the Son of God. The Miracles prove his divinity and that is important to John and to those who were reading this gospel. So seeing this as a true miracle of multiplication of loaves is ok for John’s version.

Another way to consider the story is that as Jesus shared the little food he had, that others who were gathered and on their way to the Passover, opened their baskets and soon food was coming from all directions. I like that version. I don’t think it takes anything away from the miraculous-ness of it. If the life and actions of Jesus get us all to share our blessings that seems a pretty good miracle to me. I know how selfish I can be.

The Rev. Paul Brunner tells a wonderful story about a young man named Jeff. Jeff learned one Sunday morning that his church was holding a picnic that afternoon. He hurried home from church to pack his lunch and get to the picnic grounds. But, lo and behold, when he opened the refrigerator door, he discovered only a single piece of dried up bologna and two stale pieces of bread (one of them a heel). And to make things worse, there was barely enough mustard to color his knuckles when he tried to scrape the bottom of the jar. Nevertheless he made his sandwich, wrapped it in waxed paper and placed it in a large paper bag (so it would look as if he had a great deal more than a single sandwich) and set out for the picnic.

When Jeff arrived, the grounds were already crowded and the only empty spot he could find was at the end of a table next to the Lawson family. As he took his sandwich from the bag and began to unwrap it, the Lawsons began to spread their feast as well. They had a warm, red checkered tablecloth, heaps of fried chicken, potato salad and baked beans that smelled like heaven to Jeff. To top it all off, Mrs. Lawson brought out two of the biggest chocolate cream pies Jeff had ever seen!

He glanced at the bountiful feast and then back at his own meager meal when he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Mrs. Lawson, “Why don’t we pool our food?” she was asking. “And we can all eat together!”

“No, I don’t think so,” Jeff embarrassingly told her. “I’m not really all that hungry, so I only brought a sandwich,” he said, hanging his head somewhat.

“Oh, please!” she smiled. “We just love bologna; we’ll cut it into pieces so everyone can enjoy it along with some fried chicken and all the fixings, and of course, some chocolate pie.” And so, says Rev. Brunner, Jeff came to the picnic that day as a pauper and stayed to feast like a king.

Some people say this is exactly what happened when Jesus fed the multitude with five small barley loaves and two small fish. The people shared with one another and there was more than enough to go around. Whether that

is a sufficient explanation of this miracle or not, it always amazes me how much food is left over at covered dish suppers.”

And the one thing we find in John’s version of this story that we don’t find in the others is the character of this little boy. This boy is poor which is indicated by the type of bread he carries. Barley was the grain of the poor in this culture. I keep wondering what he is doing here. Where did he come from? Is he with his parents or was he just on his way to the Passover on his own? How did Andrew happen to see him and notice he had bread and fish? Did Jesus ask the boy if he could share his bread with the rest of the group? I wonder what kind of conversation that was.

Jesus: Hey little brother, how are you today?

Boy: Pretty good. I’ve walked a long way to see you and my parents are around here somewhere. We’re on our way to the Passover.

Jesus: Yes, I can see that. There certainly are a lot of people here. And thanks for coming to see me. I really appreciate it.

Boy: Sure! I’ve heard a lot about you. Can you really heal people and make them better?

Jesus: Well, people do say that about me. Honestly, I don’t know how it happens. I just ask my heavenly father to bless my gifts and somehow things change for the better. I think that’s how it works?

Boy: Wow! That is so cool!

Jesus: I know! Totally! (Jesus looks around and see all the people on the hillside.) Well, it looks like we got a pretty good gathering here today and it’s almost lunch time...would you maybe be interested in helping with a small miracle?

Boy: Boy Howdy! You Bet! What can I do?

Jesus: Well, now that you mention it...

And we know what happened next. But I think the real miracle for me, is the example Jesus sets by his actions and faith in God. He takes bread and gives thanks, he blesses it, he gives it to God, and then he shares it. Jesus himself steps out in faith trusting that the act of sharing would elicit a heavenly response. For me this story may be as much about Jesus’ own boldness of faith as it is anything else. Jesus trusts these gifts to God and it is God who does the multiplying. Even Jesus may have wondered if it would happen this way, even though John says he knew ahead of time. This is the only version of the story where anyone says that.

Jesus in the other versions says, “What have you got?” Let’s give that to God and see what happens. And that, for me, is sort of what I’m needing to hear right now because just like the disciples, I look at all the needs in the world and think, just like Phillip, that it would take a million dollars to make a dent in that. To even give the people a taste would take more than I have to offer. I don’t know about you but I feel that way a lot lately. The world just has too many needs and nobody can fix it. And all I have to offer is a dried-up bologna sandwich with not enough mustard on it.

But that’s not Jesus’ story today or the story of the life of the faithful. In this story everyone has enough. All are satisfied if only for a moment. And it all began with a little boy who had 5 barley loaves and 2 dried fish. Now that’s not much to start with is it? But God takes our little loaves and makes them into so much more. Where we see *impossible*, God makes *Possible*. And so I think the presence of the little boy is John’s way of including his own congregation. He puts us in the story and shows us how little things can make a difference.

Jesus acted in faith that God would bless the small things and hearts would open in generosity. We've seen it before haven't we?

I can't help but think of our own ministries here in both churches. A few backpacks and school supplies suddenly begin to multiply into needed gifts for students and families. A few extra coins fall into a jar and those who need fuel in the winter or help in an emergency are warm and safe through the CARE Program. A couple cans of food and a few crackers become a ministry of food and compassion with the elderly shared by three churches. Do you remember when we started FMS and all we were giving out was a small sack of food with maybe 10 items in it? We were worried we wouldn't have enough for everyone. And now, we are providing literally tons of food to folks in the community. Wow! Totally cool! And Jesus continues to turn to us and ask the question, "How shall we feed all these people?" Not just food but by extension; justice, love, grace, forgiveness; how shall we extend to all those people the fullness of God; the breadth and length and height and depth of God that Paul talks about?

And I think we do that by doing just as Jesus did. We take the gifts we have, either small or large, and we give them to God and trust that God will use them and multiply them over and over again until all are satisfied. We still do our part. We still need to give what we can and not feel as the disciples did, that you can't make a difference. I love that quote by Henry Ford who said, "Whether you think you can or not, you are right." Everything makes a difference, not only to others but to you. You too will be satisfied. And you too, will be changed.

You see, it doesn't take very much to get a miracle going, but sometimes we are just like Phillip and can't bring ourselves to see what might be possible if we trust God with our gifts, talents, money, futures, and safety. But Jesus comes along and says, "Show me what you've got and let's offer that to God and then stand back sisters and brothers, because anything, anything can happen! Here I am! Do not be afraid! Thanks be to God! Let us pray.

Great God of love and compassion, we offer to you the gifts of our lives and ask that you use them, both great and small, to multiply the joy of your kingdom here on earth. Remind us to be ever thankful for the many blessings in our lives and let us be generous with those blessings that all may be fed and cared for. And when we begin to think that five loaves and two fish are never going to be enough, remind us that if we give them to you, you will do the rest, and it will be enough. Amen.