

A Sermon for Pentecost 8: The Feeding of The 5000

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Today we look at John's version of the miraculous feeding of the 5000. This must have been a very important story in the early days of the church because it is included in all 4 Gospels and Mark tells it twice. John says Jesus attracted the crowd because of the signs he was showing them. The other Gospels suggest that they came to see and hear Jesus. But for whatever reason they came, at the end of the day, the disciples were hungry and tired and urged Jesus to send the people away to get something to eat because they were hungry and there was nothing nearby to feed them, and Jesus replied, "You feed them." The disciples said, "We feed them; there is no food here and if there were we don't have enough money to feed such a multitude." Jesus asked them to see if any of the people had any food they would share. The disciples checked and found 5 loaves and three fishes. Jesus blessed the collection and told them to distribute the food. As you know, everyone ate and there were many basket loads of food left over.

Now John says that was a miracle and evidence of Jesus' divinity, and he follows it up with another miracle, walking on the water." I think that is supposed to persuade us that Jesus was and is divine and worthy of being a god or what we call being a part of God. John's Jesus is much more than human, very different from us.

John's Jesus is quite different from the Jesus of Mark and Luke, who tell us about a compassionate man who had empathy for the feelings people. Through the years we people have wanted to believe that we can partake of the miracles of Jesus. And every now and then people do report miracles of being healed, escaping death and being a friend of Jesus who takes their troubles away. But modern science does a study and reports to us that most of the time, people don't get a healing and even if they did all the time people go on and die like people do. So if you are going to believe in transcendent other worldly being like God, the father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, it is best not to look for science and probability to provide evidence that Jesus was God. In this day and time if you are a believer you have to find qualities in the man Jesus that are worth emulating. So let's see what this story tells us about Jesus. The Bible stories tell us that Jesus could and did heal the sick and feed the hungry. When was confronted with sick and hungry people he responded to them. I call your attention to the fact that he did not permanently cure anybody; they all got sick again and died. And he did not solve the problem of hunger in first century Galilee. They all got hungry again and apparently got enough food to survive long enough to tell this story.

I like the story of the Good Samaritan who went down into the ditch to respond to an injured man. The good Samaritan did not ask the wounded man if he wanted help, and the story did not tell us that the Samaritan thought the man's experience of the road to Jericho would teach him a lesson about getting beat up and robbed. We are not told that the Samaritan appealed to the legislature of that day provide more police on the road to Jericho so people could travel safely. That Samaritan did nothing but respond to another man who needed some help. That is what Jesus did that day when he fed 5000 people. We don't know how he did it. The logistical arrangements of such a catering service seem formidable. I don't think we can examine the practical problem of the miracle. But I think we can examine the motivation of Jesus and events of the day. The people followed Jesus, he fed them and they were satisfied . . . that day.

Now I think there is a lesson for us in the story of the miraculous feeding. At this time in our lives are scared to death of terrorists, economic distress, Korea, fundamentalist Moslems and some of us are looking at our birthdays. Does Jesus have anything to offer us in all this fear that we have. Franklin Roosevelt was right, the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. But if we are conscious we have to admit that we are fearful. There is plenty in this world to be afraid of. Sometime it seems like we are fearful of just about everything and everybody. So I ask myself if Jesus has anything to offer me. My answer is yes . . . if I am willing to accept his responses to me at this time and this moment. I believe Jesus does tell me trust him now and at the time of my death, and he

reminds me to remember when he has responded to me before. I do. And I am comforted by Jesus the Good Samaritan who responds to my distressed condition in 2009.

One time a crippled beggar called out to Jesus to heal him, and Jesus learned that the man had been waiting for a miracle for 40 years. Before Jesus healed the man, he asked him if he would be healed (or are you in the attention getting business). The man said he was serious and Jesus healed him. That was the only time we are told what happened after a healing. The scriptures say the man followed after Jesus. I guess he became a disciple.

So here we are, distressed, aching for help, praying for help. Jesus asks if we will be helped. Or what? And if he helps us, makes us feel more confident in the resources of this great country what are we going to do, go on complaining about the inadequate government or accept the miracles and follow along after Jesus?

It's up to us.

Amen