

25 August 2024 – *Worship and Picnic in the Park*

Message ***What did you bring to the picnic?*** Mitch Coggin

The passage in Mark is about the feeding of the 5,000 - a story that we think we know well. But the story is not only about food and feeding a hungry crowd. If we only look at that story from a surface level, we miss the deeper truths.

At the beginning of today's gospel, the disciples gathered around Jesus and began telling him what they had done and taught; quick to fill him in on their contributions to his ministry. We're told that a large crowd had been following Jesus. So, to get away from some of the demands of the ministry, Jesus decides to take his disciples to a deserted place. They sail across the Sea of Galilee for time to themselves. They notice that the large crowd has followed them there. Jesus had compassion for them and saw their spiritual poverty, He taught them in that deserted place.

When it was evening, the disciples wanted to send the crowd away so the people could find food in the village. Jesus turns the tables on the disciples and challenges them saying, "You give them something to eat."

Don't you sometimes want to help Jesus grasp on the reality of the situation? The disciples rationalize, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late...Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them...?"

Some sociologists have been writing for some time about a phenomenon called compassion fatigue. It refers to this feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of need that we're now constantly confronted with because of the accessibility of information. Like the burned-out disciples, we're tempted to lament about how much need there is in our churches and how inadequate we feel and respond to the needs.

Jesus invites us to challenge our own "we don't have enough, and we don't know what to do." He puts the responsibility back on the disciples and on us. What did you bring to the picnic?

Jesus asked his disciples to bring him the loaves and fish. Notice, the text says that Jesus took the loaves and the fish, and he gave thanks. That may be the most important phrase in this whole story. Jesus took what little he had been given and he gave thanks for it, and then the miracle could begin. After Jesus had blessed the food, the disciples served the crowd. The disciples collected twelve baskets of leftover pieces.

Jesus taught the disciples a deeper lesson that God does not work alone. He didn't take the fish and bread and do the work himself. He prayed a prayer of thanks and handed the bread and fish back to the disciples. The facts were the same. They still had the same amount of food, and they were still staring into the faces of hungry people. Retired President of Princeton Seminary, Craig

Barnes says... *Jesus never promises success. The thing that distinguishes us is not that we have a worthy mission. Again, there are non-Christians who are doing very worthwhile things with their lives that are making a difference. No, I believe the thing that distinguishes the disciples of Jesus Christ is our gratitude for what Jesus has done, is doing, and what Jesus will do. We pay attention to even the small miracles that unfold in his hands when we give him what we have as little as it may be. And we are made thankful. And the reason this distinguishes us is because we live in a society that has embraced complaint as a virtue...*

The disciples realized that it was not up to them to create the miracle, but they could indeed participate by taking the bread and the fish and moving in the direction of the incredible need. Abundance is not ours to create. We experience the joy of serving God that does far more abundantly than we might ever ask or imagine.

In this story, it took people who had scarcely enough, who were out of food and out of ideas. It took the disciples, well-meaning as they were, who had to be convinced that their meager efforts could produce dramatic results. They had to be the ones who passed out the food and collected the leftovers after people had consumed all they wanted.

We read Paul's letter written to the new congregation in Ephesus. Paul knows that he cannot provide what they would need to get through the struggles they would face. Paul knows all too well that being the church is not a self-help project. He knew the church must rely upon God, not on their own efforts. We do not define or create the church alone. Paul reminds us that while whatever we do may seem inadequate, there is a power beyond what we are doing because we are being built together spiritually as a dwelling place for God.

Again, these two passages are not about what is at the surface level. It is about a deeper trust and a sustaining relationship with God that can easily be missed because we are focused on what we have or what we don't have. We are focused on what we need to do and who needs to do what. We are focused on the externals as opposed to the internal condition of our heart and our mind and in whom we place our trust.

Feeding the 5000 must move from our head, where it isn't possible or practical, to our heart.

Craig Barnes continues... *You know, it's so striking that Jesus doesn't just create bread for the hungry people. No, he multiplies the loaves and fish that the disciples give him...Jesus retains the role of being the miracle worker, the savior, but he is not going to feed the hungry or establish justice for the oppressed...or provide community for the lonely by just creating those things out of thin air. No, he chooses to multiply what you give him. That's how the miracle works. Or doesn't work. It all depends on what you give. But what thankful people most want to do is be givers.*

What will you bring to the picnic?