

St Andrews Gananoque  
August 2, 2020  
Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21  
Sermon: "Feeding With Faith"

Our passage for today is a memorable event in Jesus' life and ministry and is a story that is easily remembered. Jesus and the disciples have moved along the lakeside location where Jesus had been teaching both the crowd and his disciples to a place further along the shore. Jesus has just learned that John the Baptist has been beheaded and he has withdrawn to a solitary place. This is one of the difficult moments in Jesus ministry where he feels the need to move away from both the crowds of people and his disciples and have some time alone in a solitary place.

I cannot help but wonder what Jesus may have been contemplating at this time. Was he remembering John the Baptist who was a not only his friend but also his cousin and how close they had become, or was this the first time that Jesus contemplated his own death that would be the fulfillment of his ministry? Or was Jesus simply drained from the traveling and ministering to the crowds and teaching the disciples? We cannot know, but it is important to make note that he felt that he needed to "get away". How many here have felt that need to take a step back from you work and "get away"? At first the idea of working from home seemed like an ideal situation, but the longer that we do it, the less appealing it seems. Regardless of where we work or how busy our daily lives are, we all need a break.

In a sense, that is what we do each week when we set aside time for church.

We withdraw from our daily routines and take some time to be refreshed and renewed in our spirits. The only problem with Jesus going out in the boat for some solitude is that the crowd follows him along the shore. We read that Jesus, upon seeing this increasing crowd, has compassion on them and heals their sick. Wow! Instead of Jesus simply rowing farther out or becoming angry that his 'mini vacation' has been interrupted or simply sending the crowds away, he is overcome with compassion for these people!

The disciples ask him later to send the crowd away to get food from the surrounding villages, and what is his response? Again, Jesus responds with compassion. There is no possible way that a crowd this large will be able to find food in a nearby town.

It may be difficult for us to imagine this right now when gatherings are greatly reduced in size and with social distancing being a necessity. If we take a moment to think about this, the sheer magnitude of the crowd, it is really overwhelming to think of how you would be able to feed this many people, especially when the total number of people present is actually closer to 15,000! You can just imagine if they were sent away what some of the reactions would be... anger, fights over available food, people racing to the nearest town that sold food, upset and unrest. Jesus replies to the disciple's request: They don't need to go away... you give them something to eat!

The record of this miracle is unique in that it is the only miracle performed by Jesus that appears in all four gospels.

If we look to the gospel of John, we read of Philip's reaction to Jesus suggestion as he states that it would take eight months wages to provide even a small amount of food for each person.

If this were a normal Sunday and we were to decide to feed everybody lunch, it wouldn't be a problem as we have access to readily available food. The logistics of what Jesus is suggesting seems impossible to the disciples! The gospel of John again differs from our passage from Matthew in that it gives us the source of the five loaves and two fishes that are offered: it is the meal of a young boy who has come forward to share his meal.

Yet Jesus again responds with compassion and asks that the food be brought to him. He gives thanks and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples who then distributed them to the crowd. Everyone who was there ate and was satisfied and they even had twelve baskets of leftovers!

I am constantly amazed at the disciple's apparent lack of faith. They have had the opportunity to not only be taught by Jesus but also have been witness to many miracles. Why do they see this as being any different?

We have had the opportunity to experience miracles in our lives or the lives of others. If we think about gardening and planting seeds, this is perhaps one of the greatest miracles that we take for granted. Cherry tomatoes are a great example of this. We expect to harvest such a large amount of food from a small seed, but often limit what God can do in our own lives. Jesus isn't angry with his disciples and he doesn't chastise them for not having enough faith.

He simply tells them to feed the crowd, and they do!

I think that one of the hardest things for us being able to understand how great God's love is for us and how limitless his power is.

We need to open up our hearts to the potential that God has for our lives. There is no checklist needed or a certain level of experience or amount of faith required. The meal of a small boy was enough to feed that crowd. We just simply have to be willing and available to what God would want for us as a congregation of believers in Christ. Too often we can only see what is impossible and forget what is possible. Let us dare to seek the same compassion that Jesus had and to share that compassion with our family, friends, our community and our world. We should listen for God's leading for opportunities where we can do the unexpected and unimaginable for those in our community and our world. Let God use what we consider to be small and insignificant to do the impossible. Amen.