August 6, 2023 FACE TO FACE

In our text for this Sunday St. Matthews 14:13-21, we read of a familiar event of Jesus feeding the 5000. Most of us have heard this story many times. I learned this story when I was in Sunday School.   I’m sure all of us at one point of time either in Sunday school, or at Bible study, or perhaps even from the pulpit have heard this miracle. And, no doubt, on all these occasions different aspects of this story would have been highlighted and different contours of the story would have been explored to come to a fresh understanding of it. I remember once I was teaching this story to children in a vacation Bible school in India and emphasized on not to waste the food, verse 20 “And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over”.

This story “the feeding of the 5000” is the only miracle that appears in all four gospels, although there are some slight differences. For example, in St. John 6:9 mentions the involvement of the small boy. The boy is only mentioned in John’s Gospel. If his gesture was the key to the understanding of this story, surely it would have been included in all four Gospels. Matthew’s version clearly emphasizes the great size of the crowd, the need for great quantities of food, and the great miracle that fills the need.

This story happens just after the death of John the Baptist. When Jesus heard that his cousin was beheaded, he did what most of us do when a friend or relative dies-he went off to a quiet place to think, pray and grieve. People had heard of Jesus and his teaching and healing, and they wanted what he had to offer. They searched for him and found him just when he wanted to be alone. Was he angry with them? No. On the contrary, he had compassion for them and taught them and healed the sick. Christ’s compassion made him unable to ignore the needs of the people.

In verses 15 and 16 we read “When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16. Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."  Now, the disciples had a problem. Where were they going to get enough food? All they had was five loaves of bread and two fish, and that certainly would not be enough to feed everyone-or so they thought. God often asks his people to do the impossible, but he makes the impossible possible. He gives us the strength and resources to complete tasks that we can’t complete on our own.

Jesus was in control of the situation. He gave instructions on how to resolve the situation. Jesus took the food, blessed it, and had the disciples distribute it to the people. Low and behold, there was MORE than enough food, in fact there were 12 baskets of leftovers!

The miracle of the loaves and fish is that it shows that in God’s kingdom there is enough of everything for everyone. Jesus’ ability to create so much out of so little shows his mastery over the natural realm. The miracle shows us God’s character, the nature of the coming Kingdom, and the nature of the Kingdom in our hearts when it has transformed us. Our heavenly Father, as the head of the household, establishes the household, sustains, and liberates us and guides us to spiritual fulfillment. The foundation of God’s household is the duty he imposes on us to care for each other.

By nighttime, the people were still there, and they did not have anything to eat all day. The disciples wanted Jesus to send them away so they could get food in the nearby villages, but Jesus had other ideas, and just like the crowd interrupted Jesus’ plans, Jesus in turn interrupted the disciples’ plans. He told them to feed the crowd.

Jesus always seems to be asking more of us than we have to give-as spouses and parents and students and workers and on and on. He calls on us to love, even when love is difficult; to forgive, even when we have been wronged; to stand fast and firm on our principles, even when it means standing alone. And those things are not easy to do. After all, we are not Jesus, and our powers are not unlimited, as his were. God’s abundance is right here, and right now.

We think we don’t have enough not because our supplies are too small, but because our “we” is too small. The “we” includes God and the gifts of all those among whom we are sent as Christ’s body. Indeed, far more of the gifts are “out there” than “in here”. That’s how it is that ministry in God’s kingdom grows by becoming viral and multiplying. If you like to learn more about the miracles of Jesus, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

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