

February 25, 2018
#15
Life giving Table. Bless.

Luke 9:10-17. Jesus feeds the five thousand

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they described for Jesus what they had done. Taking them with him, Jesus withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ When the crowds figured it out, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about God's kingdom, and healed those who were sick.

¹² When the day was almost over, the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so that they can go to the nearby villages and countryside and find lodging and food, because we are in a deserted place."

¹³ He replied, "You give them something to eat."

But they said, "We have no more than five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ (They said this because about five thousand men were present.)

Jesus said to his disciples, "Seat them in groups of about fifty." ¹⁵ They did so, and everyone was seated. ¹⁶ He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷ Everyone ate until they were full, and the disciples filled twelve baskets with the leftovers.

Mark 8:1-9 Jesus feeds four thousand people

⁸ In those days there was another large crowd with nothing to eat. Jesus called his disciples and told them, ² "I feel sorry for the crowd because they have been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them away hungry to their homes, they won't have enough strength to travel, for some have come a long distance."

⁴ His disciples responded, "How can anyone get enough food in this wilderness to satisfy these people?"

⁵ Jesus asked, "How much bread do you have?"

They said, "Seven loaves."

⁶ He told the crowd to sit on the ground. He took the seven loaves, gave thanks, broke them apart, and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they gave the bread to the crowd. ⁷ They also had a few fish. He said a blessing over them, then gave them to the disciples to hand out also. ⁸ They ate until they were full. They collected seven baskets full of leftovers. ⁹ This was a crowd of about four thousand people! Jesus sent them away,

Life Giving Table

We are in the second week of Lent. How is your life? How is your soul? Are you feeding your soul with food? We will continue talking about Life Giving Table. We will continue to explore whether it could be that physical food and our spiritual hunger has a connection. We will continue to look at our deepest desires, our hungers, our not so healthy eating and overeating and see if there a connection. Could it be the truth that my hunger for physical food is really a screaming voice from my soul? Maybe our souls are experiencing famine and we by ignorance or by not knowing continue to feed our stomachs when truly what we need is to feed our souls. What if the eating is the time when we truly feed our souls? Continue thinking about, continue asking yourself, how is with my soul? Am I eating the true bread, the true life giving food, that is Jesus Christ.

I struggle a lot and I pray a lot. Almost every morning I pray, God help me not to over eat, help me to stop and help me to realize my real hunger is not for the food of my body, but for the food that truly gives me Life and joy. I struggle so much with eating.

People can't live by bread alone, but by every word spoken by God.

Last Sunday we talked about how important it is to gather for a meal. Hear Jesus knocking at the door and let him in and may we eat together with Jesus at our table. How crucial it is to feed our family not only the food for our bodies but also the food for our souls. It is important to gather to eat. Together in our praying and our talking we ask always for God to feed our souls. "Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God." (Mt4:4)

Celebrate God's abundance

Today we read about two similar miracles that Jesus performed. The story of feeding the 5 thousand is the only miracle that is recorded in all 4 gospels. It means it is significant and it has been told many, many times. I bet there is not one today here who has not heard about this miracle. I thought to myself, should I choose some other story that it is not so well known? But I believe that just because we know it very well it does not mean we know all about it. It does not mean that God is no longer feeding us through these stories.

A young pastor was really preparing for his sermon. He was preparing weeks and weeks for his sermon. He was going to preach about Jesus feeding 5 thousand people with two fish and 5 loaves of bread. So when the time came for him to preach, he stood up and said: Jesus took 5,000 fish and 2,000 loaves and he fed five people!" He paused very dramatically and pointed his finger at the congregation and said, "Could you do that?" I think we all can do that. Sadly, I think we do it all the time. With the abundance that God is giving us, we do so little. We think of the limitations and not possibilities, we think about our reality and not about God's reality. We think what we can do instead of what God can do. We have so much and we do so little.

Welcome the inconvenience.

This is the story we need to hear today again. Both stories are similar. Jesus responds in the same way in each situation. In the story with 5 thousand people, Jesus was so not ready to be with crowds again. Jesus withdrew privately. Why? We can look just a chapter back and see that John the Baptist was beheaded: Jesus' cousin, the one who baptized him. Jesus is grieving. He did not want to teach. He did not want to heal the people. However, when he saw the crowds he welcomed them. He welcomed even though he had other pressing matters on his mind. How important it is for us to do what is right and not focus on our convenience. Maybe you feel very much like not being or not talking with some people. Maybe you just want to be with yourself. You have so much trouble and sadness, you just want to be left alone. But these people, these situations appear in front of you. Will you welcome them and see the miracles God will do? The best way is to face people and life. Welcome what God brings into your life.

Since we are talking about the food and eating. How many times do I just want to eat and to be done. I want to eat what I want and how much I want when I want. I know some people who like to eat when nobody sees them. So often I do not want to set a table, serve, be a good listener and think about feeding the souls of my family. But what is easy to do does not mean it is right to do. First, when he saw the crowd he fed their souls. He talked about God's kingdom. He healed them. He was not even worried about the food because He was giving Life to the people.

If people are hungry, then feed them.

It reminds me of the time when I was serving in Lithuania, in Vilnius. I was not a pastor, and not even thinking yet to pursue such a calling. I loved the church and I loved working with youth and kids. Our church was on the second floor of a car repair shop. In our little congregation, we had mostly kids and youth. The children came from rough and poor families. We served communion every week. I noticed that some of the children would come for communion several times. They were desperate to take it one more time. I first thought, maybe they just do not know any better. After all they were just kids. So I explained to them all about the communion. The next Sunday the story continued: the same things, these kids would just move with the determination to have another peace of bread. Then it became clear to me, they were hungry. Of course they would come the second time. Yes, I needed to feed them. So, from that Sunday morning on, I always had some food or at least some cookies before the worship service.

When the disciples said to Jesus, "We need to send these people home or we need to feed them." what did Jesus say? "You feed them. I feed their souls, now you feed them with the food for bodies."

After a little discussion, Jesus changed His mind. Did he plan to feed these crowds? No. What we will find out next Sunday will be the very opposite, because Jesus will plan to invite certain people and to eat with certain people. However, with this miracle Jesus was moved. He was moved with compassion by the need they had and He is moved by the need we have. He cares for all of our needs. He loves us.

Sit

The first commandment from Jesus is: to seat them in groups of about fifty. In both stories. Yes, listen from the story of feeding 4 thousand. He told the crowd to sit on the ground. Isn't that strange? I think this was a new verse for me. It never jumped out and spoke to me so loudly before. Why? We could just pass the plate of food and eat; we could eat by twos or threes. It is a pretty big group. I think Jesus wants us to enjoy the food together in groups. Jesus wants us to sit while we eat with each other. It is important to eat together. Whatever the church is and whatever we are doing as a church, God brings us into groups. Eat together, sit, relax, stop of what you are doing. He did not give the food and send them home so they could walk and eat. Or in our time, drive and eat. We love running and love being busy. We are always on the go, always on a mission eating while we are going. No time. Really? We presume it is not a big deal? Jesus commanded to sit. He did not perform these miracles before they got in to groups to eat. We must sit with others and talk about what Jesus taught. Sit and eat together facing each other.

Give what you can. God will do the rest.

Jesus takes what we have. In both stories it is not about what we have or how much we have. It is important we give what we have. Why? He probably could have lifted hands to heaven and the food would have come from heaven. He could touch the empty plates on this occasion-empty hands, and make them full of food. No. God is using what we have. God loves to bless with what we have, if we trust to give what we have.

{SLIDE} "He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd" He looked up to heaven. I think He saw the Lord, His Father. He saw Him and thanked Him, for all comes from God. Isn't that true? Is not the food we eat from God? Who waters the land, gives sun and makes the seed grow? Is it not a miracle we have food? Every day? Yes, indeed.

Have you ever worried whether you have enough? People saw that they did not have enough. There was not enough food. There is no way to feed such a big crowd.

Do you think this is a miracle that worked only for the 1st century people? Do you really still believe in miracles? Or in just some kind of miracles? I recently heard a pastor saying that people suddenly started to share what they had and that was the miracle. Oh, it makes me a little bit mad. There is nothing in these stories about people taking out and sharing with each other **WHAT THEY HAD** hidden, **IT IS WHAT GOD GAVE**. Jesus performed a miracle multiplying the bread and fish: not because they suddenly started to share. It is God who was and is giving. Yes, he is giving because we give and share, but it is from Him, from His miracle we have more than we had, or more than what we need. If we cannot believe it, that does not mean that it did not happen. **DO** you believe or refuse to believe?

Thanking God or Blessing the Food

I would guess most of us pray before a meal. What kind of prayer do you say? Do you bless the food? Do you say thanks to God? I think we need to see God like Jesus did. Rather than ask God to bless our food, because the food is already clean and blessed, we bring thanks to God. We praise God for his endless miracle of giving us food again. Why is this important? First,

I do not think it changes the food, but I think it changes us and how we eat and what we think about the food.

Your soul needs food more than your groaning stomach.

Show gratitude, slow down, recognize the hunger for your soul and eternal food that we need and receive the healing that we need. First feed your soul, recognize God's miracle. Recognize God's presence. Sit down and have people to eat with you. Remember, your soul needs food more than your groaning stomach. Pray for nourishment for your soul.

Jesus broke the bread and gave disciples to distribute. The miracle only happens when we share and give to others. So different. We think we will have more if we do not give. But God's feeds many when we share. God's multiplies as we give.

Believe, gather, praise God, be with people, eat with people, see God's miracle in all of your life.