

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins, Curate

Scripture: Mark 6: 30-44

***"You – Give Them Something to Eat"***

**That's Not What Happened!**

It was just three years ago this weekend when, after finishing my first year in seminary, I was asked to help out my good friend Dave and fill in for him leading the worship music of the Saturday night service at his field study parish. It was I must add a rather liberal church in the Diocese of Pittsburgh that was led by a conservative rector. Well, not only was Dave not going to be there, but neither was the rector! He had a supply priest (a member of that church) fill in for him that night. The Gospel was Mark 6: 30-44 about the feeding of the five thousand. The service was rather uneventful until the sermon. When this priest began to speak – there was horror on the faces of my family, the deacon, and of course – you should have seen me. He began to tell us that the only miracle that took place was the fact that the people who had brought food – which was kept hidden, decided to share what they had and it was more than enough. He didn't explain how twelve baskets full of food were left over. I am quite proud of the fact that my son John kept shaking his head, and especially for the fact that my daughter Theresa, then just 10 years old, told her mom, in her "outside voice" – "that's not what happened!" Out of the mouths of babes!

In our time in the Episcopal Church, up to this point, we had only attended churches of sound doctrine – that believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and of His power and authority over all things – even bread and fish! At this church we were force fed a sermon of the most horrible drivel – straight out of the liberal seminaries – which wasn't about what God could and would do, but it was about all that humanity can do. This was our very first "close up" introduction to the substitution of the Church of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with the Church of I, Me, Mine. The very church that would go on and vote – not one, but two General Conventions in a row – not for God's will, but for the will of I, Me, Mine – and what satisfies the masses. What incredible deception – what incredible twisting of the truth – to rob Jesus of His majesty – and to instead bathe mankind with all of the glory. There is no miracle in sharing – there is however a miracle in the Lord Jesus Christ – taking five loaves and two fish – and feeding thousands of people – leaving twelve baskets of leftovers.

It is important to note that all of the four Gospel tell of this account and the detail is remarkable. They are so detailed that they must have come from people who were there as eyewitnesses. This is no made up story – about sharing and caring, but about compassion and love – in and through the power of Jesus – and the ministry of his followers. It was spring time, because we are told that the grass was green – and that only happens in the spring time when there is rain and the melting of the snow peaks in the mountains. The water is abundant at that time – and so the green grass. The rains stop in May and so later in the year it is scorched, dried, and brown. The people sat on the green grass in groups of hundreds and fifty. It was probably near the time of Passover – which is important because this is quite reminiscent of the miracle that God performed daily for the Israelites in the wilderness – providing manna for their survival. Note also that how Jesus had them sit in groups points back to Exodus 18 when Moses chose leaders of people in groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

The Lord instructed the Disciples to stop grumbling about getting rid of the people – and He told them: "You give them something to eat." Jesus insisted they find out what bread was available, probably back at the boat and also in the crowd. The disciples returned with the answer: a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. The Gospel of John tells us that they were five small barley loaves and two small fish – belonging to a young boy. Jesus emphasized the word YOU – in Greek ὑμεῖς *humeis* – reminding the disciple to always start with what you have before you ask God to give you more. By telling them "You

give them something to eat” Jesus expresses the impossibility of His command given their resources. A denarius equaled a day’s wages. Two hundred denarii, assuming that would be enough to feed the crowd, certainly represented more than their resources could cover.

### **In His Hands – Not Ours**

It is also important to remember that the miracle took place in Jesus’ hands, not in the hands of the disciples; for whatever we give to Him, He can bless and multiply. You see we are not the manufacturers – we are only the distributors! How awesome it is to have a Lord and Savior who can solve every problem, meet every need, and enable us to minister to others – just as that day two thousand years ago.

Jesus spoke the customary Jewish blessing over the loaves and the fish. He most probably said “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth” The object of the blessing was not the food, but God who gave it. Jesus looked up to heaven, in dependence on the Father for a miraculous provision of food. Then He broke the loaves into pieces, divided the fish into portions, and gave, which in the Greek imperfect tense used said “kept giving”, the portions to His disciples to them give to the people. How the miracle itself took place is not stated, but the tense of the verb “gave” would indicate that the bread multiplied in Jesus’ hands.

The provision was miraculous and abundant. The count of 5,000 men, a pretty huge crowd by any standards, did not include women and children, who were probably grouped separately for the meal according to Jewish custom. The number was probably doubled! Imagine if we instructed the ushers at St. Bartholomew’s to only count the men when they come in to services. Look around you – how the numbers would change – why, the numbers would look more like the dwindling number in the churches of I, Me, Mine in the area. But because we “give them something to eat” spiritually – something to grow on – preaching and teaching God’s Holy Word – our numbers are far greater – Thanks Be To God! And how awesome it is that God has given to us this Scripture from the Holy Gospel – on the day when He is feeding us physically with our Parish Picnic. How awesome, indeed!

The disciples help to share in Jesus’ ministry by

- taking the initiative,
- directly participating in obtaining the food – the five loaves and two fish,
- and by distributing it.

Jesus was revealing to the world just who He really was, and charging His disciples – His followers - with following His instructions. Last week we talked extensively about how we are called to follow Jesus’ instructions – and not some other feel good, social gospel – full of secular, Millennium Development Goals. If we follow Jesus’ instructions to evangelize, to preach and teach His Gospel, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and obeying everything He has commanded – then our love for one another will have us living His Gospel – and we have no need for any other gospel. Jesus’ words “***You give them something to eat***” were meant for that specific event, but can indeed be heard loud and clear in Matthew chapter 25 when Jesus tells about the sheep and the goats: when the Son of Man tells the “sheep” “*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*” He goes on to tell the “goats”: “*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.*” Living the one true Gospel of Jesus

Christ, and following His instructions in His Holy Word – is the prescription that is needed to end world hunger, to help cure illness and disease – and that includes everyone!

**The Church of I, Me, Mine:**

We are surrounded by the Church of I, Me, Mine that preaches love and inclusivity, but carries out a mission excluding those who are conservative, orthodox Christians. We are made to feel like pariah – all because we refuse to leave our firm stand on God’s instructions – His Holy Word. We are called homophobes and hate mongers, literalists, right wing fundamentalists and more – excuse me, but who is doing the hating and the name calling? Could it be because we called by God to remind and admonish our brothers and sisters when they sin? Or is it reminding them that God hates the sin, but loves the sinner? It would sound to me that the Church of I, Me, Mine are the ones who are orthophobes (fearful of the Orthodox) - or dare I say it, Christophobes! (fearful of true followers of Jesus Christ) Let me ask you this – why is it that the ones who have not budged from the faith once received – are suddenly the bad guys in the eyes of the ones that want to change and revise God’s Word – making silent substitutions along the way? All of that aside – our mission is to stay the course – being gratefully obedient – following the instructions that Jesus has given us – to evangelize. The Church of I, Me, Mine doesn’t talk about spreading God’s Word, but only about spreading good will. Excuse me, but if you truly spread the unadulterated Word of God – good will, healing and transformation takes place to those who truly listen and respond to it. Isn’t it ironic that the parishes that a preaching, teaching and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ are growing – while the ones that preach the feel good social gospel are dwindling, and living off endowments (dead people’s money), or worse yet – closing their doors? How tragically sad!

Evangelizing is life giving! Evangelizing is not standing on a street corner “thumping on your Bible”, or going door to door to preach to people, but inviting neighbors and friends to speak with you, sharing the love of Christ in everything you do. Giving people something to eat is not just physical, but it is spiritual as well.

- True, part of Jesus’ instruction to “give them something to eat involves **preparing bags of food and bringing them on the first Sunday of each month for the Food Pantry.**
- True, part of Jesus’ instruction is **to volunteer for the Buffalo City Mission and Cornerstone Manor, helping to serve food to the homeless.**
- True, part of Jesus’ instruction is to **feed the hundreds who will come this Saturday to Rock, Rods, and Relationships – giving them real evidence that the love of Christ is free – to all who will accept it, and be bathed in the light of His transforming love and grace.**

These are examples of living the Gospel of Christ – sharing His love, mercy and grace – along with His Holy Word – and not some watered down – sin-free mush. **Jesus’ Gospel is real meat and potatoes** – life giving food – and **not just some “get along goulash!”** God’s Holy Word is life giving, life changing, and life sharing. If you will – this is the miracle of sharing – not the loaves and the fishes – but the Gospel account of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. That is the true miracle of sharing.

Some have looked at this miracle of the feeding of the five thousand as an example of the coming first Eucharist at the last Supper, but that is not it at all. There is no wine mentioned – just bread and fish – but more importantly the blessing was to God the Father. The instructions Jesus gave were “You give them something to eat.” Jesus did not instruct them at that time to “do this in remembrance of me” – but instead was reminding them to feed His sheep through His provision, wonder and glory.

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost, July 22 & 23, 2006, Liturgical Year “B”

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not remind you that of the throngs of people present, Jesus “*had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd*” (**Mark 6:34**) He was and ins their Shepherd and was going to show them, and provide for them in His instructions to His followers. After His death and resurrection – the risen Jesus reminded Peter and the rest at the shore of the Sea Of Galilee – after He fed them breakfast. He told them “*feed my lambs,*” then He said “*tend my sheep*” and finally “*feed my sheep.*” My brothers and sisters in Christ - those instructions have no expiration date – and are just as true today – physically and spiritually - to each one of us. “*You give them something to eat!*”