

## “And They All Ate and Were Satisfied”

Mark 6:30-44

Whenever I talk about the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 in Bible class or Confirmation class, I like to point out a bit of trivia which is anything but trivial. Did you know that the feeding of the 5000 is the only one of Christ's miracles that has the distinction of appearing in all four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). No other miracle appears in all four. This must be important. It is certainly not trivial. Why is giving people some food such a big deal?

It would seem that miracles such as the raising of Jairus' daughter, as we saw a few weeks ago, or raising Lazarus from the dead would be seen as far more noteworthy to appear in all four Gospels. Jesus did many miracles that helped people much more than giving one meal to a crowd.

Besides, in His Sermon on the Mount [Mt. 6:16-18], didn't Jesus say that fasting was profitable for a person? Even Luther says in the catechism that fasting is fine outward training. So if these people didn't get some food, it really wouldn't have been a major problem for them. Jesus could have suggested that the people fast for the day. Fasting, going without food, in devotion to God was a regular part of most people's worship life. But Jesus had other plans. The meal is very important.

The meal is very important on several levels. First, in the ancient world, participating in a meal with someone signified that

there was a good relationship, a close relationship, complete forgiveness for anything in the past, and therefore no grudges held between all the people sharing that meal. You didn't just eat with anyone. Once again, we see that Jesus ate with sinners and received them in faith.

Then there is the foreshadowing of a greater meal to come in the sacramental language. Jesus "said a blessing, (that is, He gave thanks), broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples." Those are words which should be familiar to all Christians. The use of them in the Gospels is intentional. Mark, like the other Gospel writers, makes it clear that Jesus was preparing the world to receive Him after His resurrection and ascension.

Also, in the minds of these Israelites, this feeding miracle would stir up thoughts of the past. This feeding miracle took place in the wilderness. They received "bread from heaven in the wilderness." No Jew would fail to be reminded of manna, the bread from heaven received by the children of Israel in the days following the Exodus. Those were days when God was unusually near and active in the lives of His people. Those days lingered in the memories of the Jews.

Those Israelites who were with Moses in the wilderness were in a close, personal relationship with God. They were God's chosen people. God had compassion on them, but not because they deserved it. They certainly did nothing on their own to deserve God's grace and mercy – they continually disobeyed and rejected God. God had compassion on the children of Israel in the wilderness because He loved them, they were helpless, and they would have died without His compassion.

In the feeding of the 5000, Christ shows that He is True God.

Just as God was in the days of the Exodus, Christ is both Teacher and Provider for the children of Israel. Once again, God is seen to be unusually near and active in the lives of His chosen people. And He has compassion on them; not because they deserve it, but because they need it.

Jesus took care of the people's physical needs, their physical hunger, but His compassion was also for the people's spiritual needs, their spiritual hunger. Spiritual nourishment was what they needed. The people who were fed by Jesus would not have physically died without the bread and fish that Christ gave to them. However, these people were in danger a spiritual starvation and eternal death if God did not have compassion on them and nourish them with the Bread of Life. The disciples said, "Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus said, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." Jesus tells His disciples that these people do not need to go somewhere else to get the nourishment they need. These people are hungry and you need to feed them. The disciples said, "We want to feed these people, but we only have a little bit to work with: five loaves and two fish. And that won't be nearly enough to do the job. We can't do it."

The disciples were right. By themselves, they didn't have what was needed to feed the people, but Christ was there. Jesus used the small, almost worthless amount of raw materials with which the disciples had, and made them not only be adequate, but there was so much food left over that the disciples collected 12 baskets full after the people had all eaten their fill and were satisfied.

Once again though, the eating of the physical bread is not the

focus. Jesus is the Bread of Life. It is the meaning behind the meal. You do not set aside your time on Saturday night or Sunday morning so that you can come and be physically nourished at this altar. The small portions of bread and wine offered at this table would not physically feed a crowd. Like my dad said last week, when he preached, the world looks at what we do and is convinced that we are wasting our time.

Yet, what you receive here is more filling than the feast Christ provided for the crowd that day in the wilderness. You come here to be filled, to have your hunger satisfied. This is the feast of victory. That is why we sing that Hymn of Praise. It is hard to have a feast with only small portions of food. That would be a strange idea. Unless those small portions were so filling and so valuable that it was treasured above any other food you could have. Then you would have a feast.

Those who do not understand the value or how filling this is, they would look at what we do and imagine that we are wasting our time.

The focus of the feeding miracle is not that people ate some bread and fish. Just as the focus of the miracle in which we participate is not eating a wafer of bread and drinking a sip of wine. How unsatisfying would that be? The presence of Christ and the compassion of Christ is here for us as we eat and drink. Through that miracle of the sacramental union, Christ remains unusually near and active in the lives of His people. Just like out in the wilderness, Christ permits Himself to be found, and He feeds us, and we are satisfied. Amen.