

***“What do you have?”***

***Series: Miracle Man***

***Matthew 14:13-21***

***October 4, 2009 ~ World Communion Sunday***

On the first Sunday in October, many churches participate in ‘World Communion Sunday.’ This is a day when Christ-followers everywhere around the world celebrate what it means to belong to the ‘holy *catholic* church.’ Now, while I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church and many of you were also raised Catholic, I know that most of you were never Catholic. And so you might wonder why we say we believe in the ‘holy catholic church’ when we use the words of the Apostles’ Creed to say what we believe. There is a difference between ‘catholic’ with a small ‘c’ and a capital ‘C.’ Capital ‘C’ refers to the church; small ‘c’ means: “including or concerning all humankind; universal.” So when we say we believe in ‘the holy *catholic* church,’ what we mean is that we believe that the church is not just our church, but the Church beyond *this* church body, beyond *these* church walls, the Church that includes all believers everywhere. The church that is open to including and concerned for *all* humankind, everywhere.

So as we celebrate Holy Communion this morning, we remember that we are part of a movement that is much larger than just our congregation. We celebrate our oneness with brothers and sisters from other Christian denominations – like St. Mark’s Lutheran next door. We celebrate our oneness with brothers and sisters in the Mam presbytery in Guatemala, with which our own presbytery has established a partnership. We celebrate our oneness with brothers and sisters in all the far-flung reaches of the world who trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. And we do that most poignantly as we gather around the Table and share the bread and the cup of Communion.

In the miracle we’re going to study today – the Feeding of the 5,000, the Loaves and Fishes – scholars have seen the suggestion – a preview, if you will of the sacrament of Holy Communion: Jesus takes the bread, He blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to His disciples. This is perhaps the best known of all the miracles Jesus did. It is the only one that is recorded in all four gospels. It is probably familiar to many of us. And you know what they say about familiarity. It’s hard to really hear a story like this in a fresh way, to hear anything new when we think we know it so well. But something new jumped out at me this week as I was studying this passage in preparation for sharing it with you today. **Matt. 14:13-21.**

As usual, Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of people – 5,000 men *plus* women and children, probably as many as 10,000 people were there that day. So it’s getting late and the disciples recognize that it’s almost dinner time and they want Jesus to release the people so they can go to the local Denny’s or Micky D’s and get a bite to eat. But Jesus says something that must have shocked them: “They do not need to go away. *You* give them something to eat.”

Church, look around. There are hungry crowds all around *us*. Not just hungry for food to eat. Hungry for acceptance. Hungry for love. Hungry for forgiveness, a chance to start over. Hungry for meaning and purpose in their lives. Hungry for reconciliation, a loving and stable family life. There are children who attend the Mount Pleasant Elementary School who come to school hungry in the morning. Who come with their hair all a mess and without a bath or clean clothes. Many who come from single parent families, mostly single moms. Many who don’t

wake up in warm beds, like we do, or come home to a warm and safe house after school. And Jesus says to us: “*You give them something to eat.*”

All around the world there are hungry crowds: hungry for clean water, hungry for healing, hungry for freedom. Thirty-four million men, women, and children in the world are living with HIV/AIDS. 2.9 million of them will not live another year. Africa has almost 12 million AIDS orphans. You may think slavery was abolished years ago. Not so. There are 27 million men, women, and children around the world are living in slavery *right now*. Each year, more than 2 million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade. The total market value of human trafficking is estimated to be more than 32 billion dollars a year. Nearly 1 billion people worldwide have no access to clean drinking water. A child dies every 15 seconds due to lack of clean water. It costs one relief organization an average of 98 cents to provide clean water for one person for one year. And Jesus says to us: “*You give them something to eat.*”

And our response tends to be just like the response of Jesus' disciples. “We don't have the resources. We only have 5 small rolls and a couple of sardines.” In Mark's version of this miracle, their response is: “We can't buy food for all these people! That would cost a fortune!” Can't you just see them rolling their eyes as they patiently (or not so patiently) explain to Jesus why this is just not possible? *They* see the need – the people are hungry. But the need is overwhelming. They don't have the resources to meet it. And it would be phenomenally expensive to even try.

And that's very often how we respond when we see the great needy crowds all around us and around the world. “We only have....” “But we can't help. It would cost....” And so like the disciples, our solution is to send them away so they can get fed somewhere else. Send them away to the government or the social services agencies or to fend for themselves with their own resources, 'cause that's what *we* do. But when the disciples say, “We can't feed them. We don't have enough, Jesus,” Jesus says, “Well, bring what you *do have* to me.” And you know, I think Jesus says the same thing to us. When we say, “We only have....” or “It would cost too much...” or “We don't have time,” or “We can't help. The need is overwhelming. Send them away...” When we say those things, Jesus says to us, “Well, what *do* you have? Bring it to me.”

“Well, what *do* you have, church?” Do you have a passion for single moms? Do you have a desire to care for older folks? Do you have a good job that gives you the ability to give to help others? Do you have an hour or two or four to serve the church or in the community? Do you have a gift for leading or teaching or organizing or painting or singing or caring for children? Do you have a heart for those trapped in slavery around the world, or dying from AIDS, or living in poverty? “What *do* you have?” Jesus asks. “Bring it to me.”

Church: What *do* we have? We've got to stop making excuses for why we *can't* feed the hungry crowds around us and start recognizing what we *do* have. Let's stop lamenting what we *can't* do and start looking for what we *can* do. And let Jesus do the miracle of multiplication. Because as surely as Jesus said to those first twelve disciples, “*You give them something to eat,*” so Jesus also commands us to give those around us something: Something to nourish them, body, soul, mind, and spirit.

**V. 19.** They bring the bread and the fish to Jesus, and He takes the little they have, looks up to heaven and gives thanks to God. Then He breaks the few loaves they have. They were like those little club rolls you might serve at a party. And then – Here’s what really struck me as I studied this passage this week: He gave them to the disciples, and *the disciples* gave them to the people. *Jesus* does the miracle: Jesus takes what little they have and multiplies it beyond anything they could imagine. He gives the bread He multiplies to His disciples and *they* feed the crowds.

Jesus didn’t feed the crowd directly Himself. He worked through His disciples. “*You* give them something to eat.” And even though they didn’t think they could, they did. You know, God could directly feed and supply every need we see around us in our community, and in the world. He is all-powerful and surely cares deeply for every child who dies of hunger-related causes each day. Every person suffering with AIDS matters to God. Every man, woman or child caught up slavery. God could feed and supply every need around us directly from His power and love. But in His divine plan, God determines to use the church – His disciples, His followers – to distribute His resources.

The disciples looked around and saw only the meagerness of their resources compared to the greatness of the need. Jesus looked up to heaven and saw the greatness of God who is able to supply every need, no matter how large. If only we will take what we have – inadequate as it may seem to us – and bring it to Him. Listen: Maybe more than anything else, we need to know how great and generous and limitless God and His resources are if we are to respond to the needs around us rather than just “sending them away.” In Jesus’ hands, our little becomes enough and more than enough. We need to *look up* and see the greatness of God, the limitlessness of His power and His love and His resources.

The bread and the cup of Communion appear small and rather useless to satisfy hunger in any meaningful way. A small bit of bread, a tiny sip of juice. And yet, these elements nourish us in ways we will never fully understand. But Jesus does not feed us and strengthen us at this Table merely so that we are fed and satisfied. Jesus has a larger purpose in mind. We are fed at this Table so we can feed others. We are strengthened so that we can strengthen others. That’s what World Communion Sunday ought to remind us of. Not just that we are in communion with fellow Christ-followers, one with brothers and sisters in the church around the world. Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives this bread to us as His body, so that we might be His body in the world. That’s what we are, church: The Body of Christ. The physical presence of Jesus in the world.

We are blessed to bless others. “Blessed to be a blessing.” That’s not just a trite saying. It really is how God intends to change the world. The church is the hope of the world. Just as we take, bless, break, and give this bread as Christ’s body given for us, so Jesus takes *us*, blesses *us*, breaks *us*, and gives *us* as His body for the world. To feed and nourish and strengthen and change the world. Remember: Jesus did not command the whole world to go to church. Jesus commanded His church to go to the whole world. “*You* give them something to eat.” God’s intended method for changing the world is.....US: the church. The holy catholic church, of which we are a part. We’re it, church. There is no plan B.

God has placed our little part of the Body of Christ here at 503 Duncan Road so that we can give *them* something to eat: the children and families and staff of Mt. Pleasant Elementary School. The people who live in Bellevue Manor and Bellefonte and Edgemoor Gardens. And not just food like macaroni and cheese or Thanksgiving turkeys or hot dogs at Community Fest. The bread of life, the good news that nothing is impossible with God. The living water of Jesus and His love. The freedom and forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration, power and possibilities and purpose of a life lived in relationship with God, through Jesus. And not just the people right around here, either: the people of Papua New Guinea and Africa and Asia – the world.

And to be honest, when we see the needs in our community and around the world, most of us feel overwhelmed. Our resources seem in adequate, especially in tough economic times like these. In 2 weeks, we're going to ask you to make a pledge to support our ministry financially. And you may think, "But I have only..." or you may think, "Tithe? Give 10%?? But that would be..." But Jesus says, "What *do* you have? Bring it to me?" We look around at the crowds and we think, "We can't handle these people. "We can't satisfy all these needs. It's too much. *They're* too much. Send them away – to the state, to the government, to the social service agencies." But Jesus says, "YOU – YOU, church, *you* give them something to eat.