

Enough for Everyone

Texts: Genesis 32:22-31

Romans 9:1-5 (Series A, 9th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 17:1-7, 15

Matthew 14:13-21

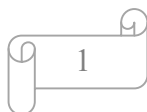
Let us pray:

O God of Mercy, as You are always for us, nothing can separate us from the enduring love of Christ but ourselves. Catch us in your ample net, and draw us from the troubled waters of this life into the eternal good of your Heavenly Kingdom. We ask through Jesus, our Hope and our Savior and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Counselor, who together with You, are our One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Once upon a time, there were three mice that died and went to heaven. After a couple of days, Saint Peter stopped by and asked them how they liked being in heaven. The mice said that it was OK but since they had such short legs, it was hard for them to get around because heaven was so big. So, Saint Peter told them that he would be able to help them. After a little while, an angel came to the mice and gave each of them a set of roller skates. Right away, the mice put the roller skates on, and they could zip around heaven, really enjoying themselves.

A little later, a certain cat died and went to heaven. After a couple of days, Saint Peter stopped by and asked the cat how he liked being in heaven. The cat answered by saying, with a big smile, "Oh, boy, do I like being in heaven! I'm having a great time, and I'm really enjoying myself. And most of all, I love those meals on wheels!"

Our Gospel speaks of Jesus multiplying the loaves and fishes for the 5000-plus people on the hillside. The lesson being portrayed here is not about the disciples serving the crowds or the boy willing to share his meal or even the fact that Jesus performed a miracle here. The important fact is that Jesus shows mercy; he has compassion for the crowd. And, he wants us to act just as he did, compassionately, mercifully. We see this kind of thing many times during Jesus' ministry. Where others could only see the difficulty of a situation, Jesus could only see the human need.



On the other hand, there are those who say that there was no miracle involved here at all but that all of the people in the crowd had brought lunches with them in their backpacks; so, when they saw the disciples passing out those meager five loaves and fishes, they brought out their lunches and began to eat.

If I may, I would like to share with you this modern-day miracle; this is a true story. After months of hard work and years of saving, the day came for Rebecca and Jack to open their own restaurant. All that was needed was the final health inspection and the issuing of their business permit. It was scheduled for first thing in the morning; then, "**Our Place**," as they called their restaurant, would be official.

But that morning, the wind and rain of Hurricane Hugo hit, unexpectedly, making its way inland to their North Carolina town. Trees were uprooted, power lines were down, and homes and stores were destroyed. Rebecca and Jack hurried to their restaurant. Everything was intact.

A police officer pulled up and told them that their restaurant, the fire station next door, and a service station down the road were the only ones that had electricity. Rebecca and Jack called the health inspector to come immediately so that they could open but, because of the power outage, the inspector couldn't get into his office to issue the permit. No *permit*, no *business* opening.

With a refrigerator stocked with 300 pounds of bacon and beef and bushels of tomatoes, lettuce, and bread, there was only one thing to do - give the food away. They told the officer, "Tell your co-workers and any other emergency people you see that we'll have free BLT's and coffee for anybody who wants to drop by."

Soon firemen, policemen, linemen, and other workers were filing into **Our Place**. The couple placed a sign in their window: *Free BLT'S - Free Coffee*. Families, travelers and street people were welcomed.

Then, something began to happen. People started to clean counters and sweep floors. Volunteers took over the dishwashing from Jack and helped Rebecca at the grill.

After hearing about what was going on at **Our Place** from the local radio station, people from a neighbouring town that had not been too badly hit by the storm, brought food from their freezers. Stores and dairies sent over chicken, milk, and foodstuffs of all kinds.

And like so, the long day went... Those first cups of coffee and BLTs somehow stretched into 16,000 meals. The restaurant's small stock increased by 500 loaves of bread, cases of mayonnaise, and 350 pots of coffee.

The disciples' reaction to the crowd was one of anxiety. *"Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith."* Jesus approached the problem with the handle of faith. When others could only see the difficulty of the situation; Jesus could only see human need, and he acted with compassion.

Once Jesus started to act confidently, telling the disciples to start handing out the five loaves and two sardines (fish), the disciples, and it seems everyone else, caught the spirit and started to pitch in to help one another.

I'm sure Jesus didn't refuse anyone in that crowd from eating; he wouldn't exclude anyone. Unfortunately, some Christian denominations are not permitted to give Holy Communion to non-members of their particular denominations. I don't think the mercy and compassion that Jesus shows in this gospel would approve of such a stand-offish practice as refusing Communion to someone who is a brother or a sister in Christ.

Many years ago, there was a woman who lived in a small village in France. Trained as a nurse, she devoted her life to caring for the sick and the needy. After many years of kind and selfless service to the village's families, the woman died. She had no family of her own, so the townsfolk planned a beautiful funeral for her, a fitting tribute to the woman to whom so many owed their lives.

The parish priest, however, pointed out that, because she was a Protestant, she could not be buried in the town's Catholic cemetery. The villagers protested but the priest held firm. It was not easy for the priest either because he, too, had been cared for by the woman during a serious illness. But the canons of the Church were very clear; she would have to be buried outside of the fence of the cemetery.

The day of the funeral arrived, and the whole village accompanied the woman's casket to the cemetery, where she was buried – outside of the fence. But that night, a group of villagers, armed with shovels, sneaked into the cemetery. They quietly set to work - moving the fence.

More astounding than Jesus' feeding of the crowds with a few pieces of bread and fish, is Jesus' transforming the crowd into a community - a community united in their need for one another, in the bread they shared, and in the love of Christ who had brought them together.

Christ empowers each one of us to perform our own miracles of creating community: when we "move the fences" to include outsiders; when we welcome the rejected, the sick, and the forgotten to our tables; when we give of what little we have, joyfully and gratefully, for the sake of others; and, when we welcome one another, as we would welcome Jesus. After all, we are of one family – created in the image of God.

Jesus makes do with what is at hand, like the bread and the sardines. Blessed and broken, touched by the power of God, it is these specific loaves which are now able to feed the multitude. Jesus doesn't need to clone more loaves; rather, in breaking open the bread, he brings forth, as no one else could, the possibilities and capabilities hidden in the depths of what is already there.

And, so he does with us as well. He *breaks* us open so that we have the capacity to be and to do, far more than we otherwise could. He *transforms* us by making us more fully ourselves, by revealing that identity of which we ourselves are not fully aware - the unique, way in which each of us is called to the image of God.

There is another part of this story that I want to mention in closing. God can use small things to do great things. Take that small boy's lunch; not much really amongst so many. Five small barley loaves and two small fish - and I emphasize the word "*small*" here. And yet, in spite of the smallness of what Jesus had to work with, look what happened - over 5,000 people were fed. In the hands of the Lord, a little is always more than enough.

- We may feel that we have very little to offer Jesus.
- We may think that we have few talents and abilities for service to others.
- We may feel that the amount of time that we can spend with people who need help and encouragement is so small.
- We feel discouraged because the efforts we have made have brought so few results.
- We feel that the love we have shown has been anything but adequate.
- We may think that our contribution to our school and church is hardly worth mentioning.

But we know, Jesus can take small things and make them into something significant and worthwhile. He can take your words, my words, and your actions, my actions, no matter how insignificant we may think they are, and use them to make a powerful and positive effect in someone's life.

Don't think that your act of kindness, your smile, your attitude, your help or whatever, is too small and insignificant to affect anyone. In the hands of the Master, they are transformed. If he can use five small barley loaves and two small fish and feed over 5,000 people, surely he can use our simple acts and words to do wonderful things for others and for the glory of God.

St. Paul puts it this way: *"My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus the Lord"* (Phil. 4:19). Since this is so, we are to go out to the poor, in the mercy and compassion of Jesus, and help supply every need of theirs. There is always enough to go around. **Amen.**

My sisters and brothers in Christ, we are once again called upon to pray, to encourage and to call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, all essential workers, etc. I would like to take this opportunity to say many THANKS to all members and friends of St. Ansgar's for their generous and continued support during this COVID-19 pandemic. Have a blessed week.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love # 708
- Accept, O Lord, the Gift We Bring # 691
- Crown Him with Many Crowns # 855

Happy birthday and happy wedding anniversary to all individual celebrating this special day in August 2020

August 2, 2020

