

## **NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST –August 2 PROPER 13**

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

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

### **Sermon**

I am confident that all of the teaching of Jesus falls into two important messages: He wanted to correct our ideas about God, and he wanted us to understand how wonderful is the Kingdom of God. We have been hearing parables that begin, "the Kingdom of God is like.. An abundant harvest, a pearl, a hidden treasure. The price of the pearl, the treasure is everything you have. The cost of an abundant harvest is giving up your fear and everything you thought you knew. What are you willing to give up in exchange for the kingdom of God? What are you unwilling to give up for the Kingdom of God?"

Today's scriptures ask us about our personal values. Isaiah asks, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" How often are we told by others what we need, what we should want? Advertising is a multi-million dollar business that tries to convince us to spend our money on things that don't satisfy. If they did satisfy, we wouldn't be spending our money on the next thing that comes along.

Just before today's passage, Jesus has been having some bad days. He had gone home to Nazareth, and the people there rejected him. He had to flee as they attempted to push him off a cliff. Then he received word that his cousin, John the Baptizer had been killed. He needed some time to think, to pray, to grieve, so he got into a boat to take a break from his ministry. He was tapped out -- no more to give, but people found him, by the thousands they found him. They all wanted something from him. He saw their need as they brought their sick to him, so he found the strength to go back to work healing and teaching.

As evening came on, the disciples were ready to call it a day. "Send these people away," they said, so they can get something to eat." I'm sure the disciples were tired and hungry too. Jesus astonished them: "You give them something to eat." "We only have five loaves and two fish." It's not hard to understand how they feel. There is too much need in our world. Too many people unemployed, hungry, hurting, scared, sick. We cry out, "We can't do it, Lord." But Jesus accepts no excuses. "Bring me what you have," he says, and then he does what they have seen him do many times: he blesses the food. Doing that, Jesus shows them that even scant resources can be enough. In his hands, even what seems to be so insignificant become more than enough.

Some scripture scholars say that today's gospel is not really a miracle story. They call it one more parable of the kingdom of God. Following the parables we heard in the last few weeks there was an explanation in which Jesus helped his disciples understand them. In chapter 16 Jesus says, "You of little faith, why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? How could you fail to perceive that I was not speaking about bread?"

The point of today's gospel is not whether it describes a miracle. It's not about how the crowd was fed. It teaches that God takes what we have, blesses it, and through this blessing, people are fed, healed and nurtured. That's the kingdom of God. Feeding the five thousand is Jesus setting an example for his church, a lesson for disciples of every generation. The hungry are always present. And we are always just a little band of disciples with pitiful resources. We look at the task before us, and we say "We can't do it...we don't have enough." We forget that we are partners with God. We deny the remarkable generosity of God and

his great kindness towards us. When God gives, God gives abundantly. God gives more than we need for ourselves so that we may have some to share with others.

God takes the little we have and multiplies it for the good of others.

God blesses, but the rest is up to us. We bring the resources we have, and we do the work. Remember: It was the disciples who brought forth that little portion, who seated the people and served the food and gathered the leftovers. How can the church do less?

Our own perfectionism creates another barrier. We demand of ourselves that whatever we put our hands to turns out exactly right. The meal served to the crowd was just bread and fish. No appetizer, no wine, no dessert, not even plates, but it was exactly what tired and hungry people needed. As G. K. Chesterton wrote “if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly”

Theresa of Avila warned, “The devil frequently fills our thoughts with great schemes, so that instead of putting our hands to what work we can do to serve our Lord, we may rest satisfied with just wishing to perform impossibilities.” She is saying we can be so overcome by the hugeness of the task, and so we do nothing. Today the Gospel asks us, What are you waiting for?

If we trust in God, if we can set aside our fear of failure, our ego-generated ideas of what we wish we could do, and begin to do the work as Jesus directs us, we will see the Kingdom of God emerging before our eyes.