

“Wonder Bread”

Date: July 1, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

Theme: God’s abundance, faith,

service

Occasion: Pentecost 7, year A

A number of years ago, a young Matthew LeSage, a third grader, wanted to do something to help the hungry of his city. So, he started a program called “Hams for the Hungry.” In its fourth year, Hams for the Hungry raised \$40,000 to brighten the holiday season for people with limited resources. A third grader! A third grader.

His story reminds me of another young man, 13 years old at the time, who read about the amazing work being done by Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the great missionary to Africa about 60 or 70 years ago. This 13 year old boy wanted to help Dr. Schweitzer. He had enough money to buy one bottle of aspirin. He wrote to the Air Force and asked if they could fly over Dr. Schweitzer’s hospital and drop the bottle down to him.

A radio station broadcast the story about this young fellow’s concern for helping others. Others responded as well. Eventually, he was flown by the government to Schweitzer’s hospital, along with 4 ½ tons of medical supplies, worth about \$400,000, freely given by thousands of people.

Today, of course, this would be worth millions of dollars in current money value. When the missionary heard the story, Dr. Schweitzer said, “I never thought one child could do so much.”

Our scripture for today is about the disciples, who didn’t have much food to offer to the crowd. But what they did have, they offered to Christ, and thousands of hungry people were fed. Look at this story with me again, and see what it might teach us about our faith today.

Matthew tells us that Jesus had just received word that his cousin John, the man who had baptized him, had been beheaded and his head brought into Herod's banquet hall on a platter. Jesus, being a compassionate man, recoiled from the horror. Jesus needed time to be alone, to deal with his grief. So, he took a boat to a deserted place. But when he came ashore, he was met by crowds who had seen his destination, and they had brought their sick for him to heal.

In spite of his own need, Jesus had compassion on these people and he healed their sick. You and I have been there, haven't we. We come home from work and we're tired, and there's a phone call waiting for us. Someone needs us. Often times, when we have already given all that we have to give, another need presents itself.

I have two things to say about this dilemma. There are going to be times when we just have to step up and do the right thing, even if we're exhausted, even if we've already given, even if we feel someone else should take care of this situation. Sometimes God is calling on us to be His hands and feet and voice, *even* when we think we don't have it to give. Jesus showed us that in this story.

But I also want to say this. Jesus was doing a good thing by going off to be by himself. His plans may have been interrupted, but Jesus knew that he needed time to grieve. He knew that he needed time for himself. A lot of Christians don't understand this principle, and they give and they give and they give, until one day there is nothing left to give. So, it's important to take time - in order to be renewed - so that we *can* give when next we're called upon. Amen? Amen!

Back to our story. Instead of spending the day renewing his spirit, Jesus spent the day healing the sick. And then evening came. The issue of food came up. It was an out of the way place, no fast food joints around, what to do? Plus, there were at

least 5,000 men, not to mention the women and children. “Send them away,” suggested one disciple. But that was not Jesus’ plan. “*You* feed them,” he said.

What? Is he kidding? The disciples do a quick inventory of all the food they’ve got, and they come up with five small loaves of bread and two dried fish. That was hardly going to be enough. Of that, they were certain. Jesus said, “Bring them to me.”

I have two points to my sermon, that I hope you’ll remember. Number one - don’t ever underestimate what it is that you bring to the Lord. Number two - don’t underestimate what God can do, with what ever you bring Him.

Point number one. Too often Christians doubt that what they have to offer God is big enough or good enough. Listen to some of these excuses and tell me if you’ve said one of these things, or heard someone else say it:

“We can’t do that. It’s too hard.” “We don’t have enough money. Where would we ever be able to get that much money?” “I’m too old, let some of the younger people do this.” “I’ve already done my part, it’s time for somebody else to get involved.” “This isn’t my gift. I don’t think I should get involved.”

When you get underneath all of those excuses, you know what you’ll find? A lack of faith. I mean, if God can create a universe out of nothing, if God can feed 5,000 plus with just a few loaves and fish, why can’t God do miraculous things with us? I’ll tell you why. God can’t do miracles if we don’t offer up the loaves and the fishes. If we don’t offer what we have, what does God have to work with?

What ministry is God calling the Church to be a part of, that is bigger than we are capable of doing on our own? How is God wanting to demonstrate His amazing power to do the miraculous? I can think of several - Imagine No More Malaria. Can we wipe out that disease on the continent of Africa by the year 2015?

That's our goal. We can do it, if we all bring our loaves and fishes to the Lord.

What about ending world hunger? What about ending homelessness? These are huge problems, that alone we can never solve. But together we can make a difference.

But if we sit back and think, my little gift, my little contribution, my little effort isn't going to make a difference, then you know what. You're right. It won't. But if you offer yourself, if you offer your gift in faith, God is able to do amazing things.

And that brings us to point number two. Never underestimate what God is able to do with the gift that you bring to Him. When the disciples finished serving everyone, they picked up leftovers, in the amount of twelve basketfuls. God not only provided enough for all to eat and be satisfied, God gave the people more than they needed.

My friends, when we pray I'm afraid that we underestimate what God is able and willing to do for us. When we bring our gifts to the Lord, for the Lord to use in blessing others, I think that we will be amazed at what God will do. Our God is an awesome and amazing God. God is gracious and good and will abundantly supply. Amen? Amen!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we sit here in church this morning 10 million people are threatened by starvation in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. Drought has led to some of the worst hunger seen in 60 years. Relief agencies are responding, but the situation is dire. Our help is needed.

There is more than enough food to feed the world's hungry. But we have got to get past the politics and the corruption and the violence. And people need to respond with compassionate hearts. Do not be discouraged. Do not be depressed.

And also do not feel that you have to solve the problem by yourself.

Do what you can. Bring your five loaves and two fish, and watch what God is able to do. Remember the story of the third grader and Hams for the Hungry. Remember the 13 year old and his little bottle of aspirin. One person can make a difference. If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

God needs our hands to do His work, to care for the needy. If we have even a little, five loaves and two fish, we are called to care. What will you do? Let us pray.