

Sermon – August 6, 2023
“You give them something to eat”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Matthew 14:13-21

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come and visit, filling open hearts and anointing the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that ignites our continuing transformation into Christ's image and leads us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen

Good morning! We have arrived at week ten of the season of Pentecost, a season when we seek to open our hearts for a fresh filling with Holy Spirit and our being led out into Jesus' mission. Both of the churches on the Northumberland Charge have voted to join the Global Methodist Church, have submitted applications, and are now waiting for those forms to be processed. Our prayers that were a year ago, “Lord, make a way” have been answered. The One who makes a way for His people has made a way for this congregation when there seemed to be no way. Praise God for His provisions in our lives and pray that He will help us be faithful stewards of all we have been blessed with from our Lord. Come, Holy Spirit, and guide us to be faithful ministers in this place and in all of the places you lead us. Thanks be to God!

Today is the first Sunday of August. That means it is Communion Sunday. The bread and juice of the vine are on the table. Before we have communion with Jesus and each other this

morning, let us reflect for a few minutes on God's provision of bread that we find in the scriptures. I am not going to trace God's provision of bread through all of scripture this morning, as that would require 368 stops in God's word. I will leave the complete journey to those who would like to dig deeper into the way bread is used by God throughout the corpus of scripture. This morning, let's look together at a few of the key provisions of bread found in the word of God.

The first provision of bread we will look at comes in the wilderness as Israel, now free of cruel bondage from Egypt, moves with God, under Moses' leadership, into the wilderness. As they go, the provisions they hurriedly prepared in Egypt are exhausted and they become hungry and begin to desire bread, remembering the "good" food of Egypt. During the Exodus journey, God provides for His people manna, the food of angels. The bread of heaven was found each morning and provided enough for each person for that day. Each day they received daily bread from God. Only on the sixth day could extra be collected and kept over to be eaten on the sabbath as no manna was found on the sabbath. God provided for the hunger of Israel in the wilderness. God's provision of bread from heaven continued until Israel entered the Promised Land. God's people were sustained by the provision of bread from heaven as they journeyed in the wilderness.

The next example of God's provision of bread we will look at is found in 2 Kings 4:42-44 (page 336 in the pew Bibles.) God's great prophet Elisha also fed the hungry with God's provision of bread. Let me read verses 42-44: "A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.¹

We should notice a few items about the feeding of hungry people with bread. Elisha is with a hundred people who need bread, and a man has come bringing an offering, the portion of fruits from the barley harvest and some fresh ears of grain in the sack he carries. He has come to honor God with the first fruits of his harvest to fulfill the Law, giving God a portion that is to be set aside as the grain harvest begins. The amount of bread the man has is small: twenty loaves of barley bread, bread for common people. The loaves would be about the size of a large dinner

roll, enough for a meal for one person but far too little for a hundred people. They will need five times the amount of bread the man brings to feed the hundred. Yet Elisha tells them to give the bread to the people, telling them that the LORD has said they shall eat and have some left. The bread is given and there is bread left after the hundred have eaten. God has multiplied a little to feed many.

Next, we come to today's reading of the feeding of the five thousand. The feeding of the thousands miracles are found in all of the Gospels, so they are important events in Jesus' ministry. Let me put this day in Jesus' life into its context. Jesus has just received news that John the Baptist has been beheaded in prison by Herod. In response to this news, Jesus has gotten into a boat and left the part of Israel that Herod controls. Jesus and those with him in the boat have moved by water to a deserted place, the wilderness, land that is outside of Herod's control. Their movement by boat would keep them from encountering any of Herod's troops that might have been sent to arrest Jesus. They are going to this deserted place to be alone, to process the news of John's death, and to rest. As Jesus comes ashore, he discovers that news of his plans to come to this deserted place has spread throughout the region and a great crowd has gathered and is waiting for his arrival. News spread quickly and the people moved with greater speed than the boat. When Jesus sees the great crowd, he is moved with compassion. Turn to someone this morning and tell them that when Jesus sees a crowd he is moved with compassion. Jesus' expression of compassion turns into healing. All day long, he heals the people who have come. His compassion is poured out into their physical needs. Those who were without hope have come. They have brought the blind, the lame, and those who are sick, hoping that Jesus will have compassion and will heal their brokenness. They have come in the hope that Jesus will heal them. And Jesus sets aside his plans and spends the day healing the people, meeting their needs, ministering to their wounds. Jesus' compassion is being poured out as healing. Don't miss that Jesus' compassion results in healing. Compassion is an attribute of Jesus. We also should expect that if we will come to Jesus, we will find compassion. And if we are following Jesus, if we are his disciples, we will also have compassion for the great crowds of people we are sent to by Holy Spirit.

Jesus' work in the great crowd is not just for a few minutes. The needs are many and healing continues well into the evening. But the great crowd is in the wilderness. There are no food stands set up to feed the crowds in the wilderness. There are no food trucks full of event

food waiting to meet the physical needs of hungry people. Jesus' disciples come to him and encourage him to send the crowds away so that they may go into the towns and villages to get food, to find provisions. Jesus hears the advice of the disciples, but his response is, in the words of the King James version, "Give ye them to eat." It is a command for Jesus' disciples; it is a place for Kay and me. Let me explain. If you take the first letter of each of the words in the King James translation you get GYTTE. That is the name of a mission site in the highlands of Mexico where Kay and I have been blessed to spend a few days and join in the work of their mission. It is a place where God's people who are created in His image live, but they don't look like us. It is a place of wilderness and difficult living but a place of abundant love. GYTTE is a place where homes are built for those with no home, new ways of bringing forth God's provision from the land are shared, deserted earth gives fruit to feed the hungry, and relationships of love were and are formed in the fellowship of labor. It is a place of transformation for those who come with open hearts. When I hear Jesus' words, "Give ye them to eat," I remember a place where provisions for hungry people happen, where needs for healing occur, and where this command to Jesus' disciples is still being obeyed through Jesus' disciples. Kay and I have the advantage; we have seen, we have lived at GYTTE. Experiencing that place gives us a different view of Jesus' command to "Give ye them to eat." We have witnessed Jesus' compassion for people. Jesus' disciples are also about to witness what it is to see God's provision. There are only five loaves and two fish to feed the great crowd. In Luke's Gospel, we are told the loaves are barley, the loaves of the common people. The fish are most likely salt fish that would keep for a few days. These are meager provisions for the disciples who came to this deserted place, and the small amount of provisions in their hands speaks to the time that the disciples had planned to spend in this place. From their view, there is not enough to feed themselves; there is certainly not enough to feed this great crowd. They don't yet know Jesus. They do not yet know the one they follow. They do not yet realize who stands among them. Jesus has the provisions brought to him. He takes the loaves and fish, lifts them up to heaven and blesses them, breaks the loaves and gives them to the disciples to give ye them to eat. We have heard the word of God read; we know what happens. The great crowd is fed, five thousand men plus women and children, truly a great crowd, and all are fed not just a little piece of bread but each one present is filled. And twelve baskets are taken up of the leftover pieces. There is more food available to feed other hungry people.

Not too many days after the feeding of the great crowd, we come to our next example in scripture of the provision of bread. We know this event well also. Jesus and his disciples are in an upper room in Jerusalem. They are eating the Passover meal, and Jesus stops the normal flow of the meal and does something new. He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples, telling them to do this in remembrance of him. In the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the details of the time in the upper room are different, but the verbs that describe Jesus' action with the bread are the same in all three Gospels. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them to eat. The Passover meal that was a time of remembrance of the mighty hand of God freeing the Hebrews from cruel slavery in Egypt becomes a time of remembrance of what Jesus will do for us. He will go to the cross, suffer in our place, shed his blood that we might be cleansed of our sin, and die in our place that we might be forgiven. We are to remember Jesus is present at this last meal with his followers. We are to remember Jesus' compassion for those who follow him. We are to remember Jesus' shed blood that cleanses us, and we are to remember Jesus' healing of our sin sick bodies that reconciles us to God the Father. And as we remember, we are to be Jesus' disciples and follow his command to give ye them to eat. We are to be those who are sharing the bread of life, Jesus, with others so that they also may be filled with God's provision. We who follow Jesus and share in this meal where there is broken bread, the body of Christ, and the fruit of the vine, the blood of Christ, are to remember Jesus' compassion for us and for the great crowd that is those in the world who do not yet know Jesus. We are to remember and be filled anew with Holy Spirit as we commune in this holy meal with Jesus. Jesus is spiritually present with us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup.

We have one last stop in the scriptures this morning where we find broken bread. After Jesus' death, as the news of his resurrection begins to spread among the disciples, Jesus comes alongside two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is not recognized by them as they walk together and he reveals to them what the scriptures hold about Jesus the Messiah. It is at a time of table fellowship when Jesus again takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them that their eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus. The Bread of Life, Jesus, is recognized in the breaking and sharing of bread. He who was dead is seen alive in the taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing of bread. And in response to being in Jesus' presence, Jesus' disciples run and tell those who hunger to hear that Jesus is alive.

We should take away from these words about Jesus two of his attributes that stand out in this morning's passage. The first is compassion. It is seen in Jesus' healing those in the great crowd who have come to him in hope of finding wholeness to replace their brokenness. Jesus' compassion is also seen in his care of physical needs as he provides daily bread to meet hunger. Jesus' compassion does not just come close to meeting their needs. It fills all who will accept this gift. Jesus' compassion is also seen in the leftover broken pieces of bread that fill twelve baskets. Jesus' compassion is overflowing and there is more compassion for those who have not yet experienced the compassion of Jesus.

The other attribute of Jesus we encounter as we meet him in the deserted place is the authority of Jesus. In the deserted place, Jesus' authority is first seen over physical needs as he heals people. Later in the day, Jesus' authority is seen over nature as the ability to multiply little into much. All who will receive the compassion of Jesus are filled with mercy and grace through the authority he has even over death. Jesus has authority over sin to forgive our sin and reconcile us to God the Father. We are Jesus' disciples. We come together today to worship Jesus and to have communion with him and with each other. Remember Jesus' compassion for us, seen in his willingness to die that we might have life. Remember Jesus' abundant love for us and open our hearts this day to be filled with the abundant, filling love of God through Jesus Christ. Come to Jesus' table and feast with him and receive broken bread that we might take that which is left and go and share the great gift we have been given with others who hunger for the peace of Christ. Prepare our hearts to be in the presence of Jesus. Then come and share the broken body given for us and the blood given for us that we might be healed. Come and join Jesus' feast. Come and experience Jesus' compassion for our hunger. And when we are filled, gather up that which is left over and go and share Jesus' compassion with others. We as Jesus' disciples are to "Give ye them to eat." We are to give to the world the bread of life.

Pray with me: Jesus, open our hearts that we might recognize you in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup. Let us who are gathered here experience your compassion anew this day. Heal our brokenness, fill us with your provision, and guide our steps as we take leftover broken bread to others. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

ⁱ Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (pp. 859-860). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.