

Matthew 14: 13-21

GLORIOUS GOD, YOUR GENEROSITY FLOODS THE WORLD WITH GOODNESS AND YOU SHOWER CREATION WITH ABUNDANCE. AWAKEN IN US A HUNGER FOR FOOD TO SATISFY BOTH BODY AND HEART, THAT IN THE MIRACLE OF BEING FED WE MAY BE EMPOWERED TO FEED THE HUNGRY IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.

MAYBE IT WAS THE SIZE OF THE CROWD ON HAND THAT DAY; MAYBE IT WAS THE "WOW" FACTOR; MAYBE IT WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EVENT FOR THE MINISTRY OF JESUS. WHATEVER IT WAS, NONE OF THE GOSPEL WRITERS MISSED IT. THIS IS THE ONLY MIRACLE OF JESUS INCLUDED IN ALL FOUR GOSPELS. IN TIME, IT BECAME A STORY THAT THE EARLY CHRISTIANS TOLD AROUND THE TABLE WHEN THEY GATHERED FOR WORSHIP. AS THEY BLESSED, BROKE, AND SHARED THE MIRACULOUS BREAD OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, THEY REMEMBERED THAT OTHER TIME WHEN BREAD WAS MIRACOUSLY BLESSED, BROKEN, AND SHARED, AND IT WAS AS IF JESUS STOOD AMONG THEM AGAIN, LAYING HIS HANDS ON A LITTLE SO THAT IT BECAME ENOUGH FOR ALL.

THERE IS NO SERMON IN THIS STORY, NOR IS THERE A PARABLE IN WORDS; THIS IS A STORY FILLED WITH ACTIVITY. THERE IS A LOT OF ACTION IN THIS STORY! CONSIDER THE VERBS ASCRIBED TO JESUS: JESUS *SAW*; HE *HAD COMPASSION*; HE *ORDERED*; HE *TOOK*; HE *LOOKED*, *BLESSED*, *BROKE* AND *GAVE*. THIS STORY IS FULL OF ACTIVITY; YET BEFORE ALL OF THE ACTION IT BEGINS WITH JESUS TRYING TO FIND TIME ALONE. JESUS HAD JUST HEARD THE NEWS THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS DEAD; BEHEADED BY HEROD. HAVING HEARD THAT, HE WANTED TO BE ALONE. AND WHO COULD BLAME HIM? SO JESUS WITHDREW IN A BOAT.

BUT WHEN THE CROWDS HEAR THIS, THEY FOLLOWED HIM ON FOOT TO THE TOWNS. HE MAY HAVE WANTED TO BE ALONE—BUT THEY HAD NEEDS OF THEIR OWN. THEY WERE SICK, THEY WERE HUNGRY, THEY WERE DEPRESSED, AND WHILE ANYONE BUT THE SON OF GOD WOULD HAVE TOLD THEM TO GET LOST, JESUS HAD COMPASSION ON THEM. HIS HEART WENT OUT TO THEM AND HE SPENT THE AFTERNOON WALKING AMONG THEM, LAYING HANDS ON THEM AND SAYING THE THINGS THEY MOST NEEDED TO HEAR.

THEN, WHEN EVENING CAME, THE DISCIPLES SUGGESTED TO JESUS THAT HE SEND EVERYONE AWAY TO BUY SUPPER IN ONE OF THE NEARBY VILLAGES. THE DISCIPLES WERE SIMPLY BEING PRACTICAL. NIGHT WAS FALLING AND THEY WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE. THEY WERE HUNGRY THEMSELVES. IT WAS TIME TO CALL IT A DAY, BUILD A CAMPFIRE AND EAT THE FOOD THEY HAD BROUGHT WITH THEM. IT WAS TIME TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES FOR A CHANGE.

THIS ALMOST SOUNDS AS IF THE DISCIPLES ARE NOT CONCERNED ENOUGH TO GET TERRIBLY INVOLVED. THERE IS AN ONGOING TENSION HERE: BIG CROWDS OF UNMET NEEDS TEND TO OVERWHELM. IF THERE HAD BEEN SIX PEOPLE FOLLOWING JESUS WHEN IT CAME TIME TO EAT, THEN PERHAPS THE DISCIPLES MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING THEY COULD DO, BUT A WHOLE CROWD OF UNMET NEED IS OVERWHELMING.

BUT JESUS HAD ANOTHER IDEA. “THEY NEED NOT GO AWAY,” HE SAID, “YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT.” IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY INTERESTING TO BE THERE AND WITNESS THE DISCIPLES’ REACTION WHEN JESUS SAID, “YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT.”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN, JESUS? YOU ARE THE BOSS, HERE. WHAT DO YOU MEAN; WE SHOULD GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT? ALL WE HAVE BETWEEN US ARE FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH, WHICH IS NOT EVEN A SNACK ENOUGH FOR THE TWELVE OF US LET ALONE 5000 PEOPLE!”

THE DISCIPLES WERE OPERATING OUT OF A SENSE OF SCARCITY...THE GLASS WAS HALF EMPTY. THE DISCIPLES LOOKED AT THE CROWD, SAW NO PICNIC BASKETS AND ASSUMED THAT NO ONE HAD ANYTHING TO EAT. THEY LOOKED AT THEIR OWN MEAGER RESOURCES AND ASSUMED THAT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO FEED THEM, MUCH LESS TO FEED THE WHOLE CROWD.

BUT JESUS OPERATED OUT OF A DIFFERENT SET OF ASSUMPTIONS. IF THE DISCIPLES OPERATED OUT OF A SENSE OF SCARCITY---THE GLASS HALF-EMPTY, THEN WHAT JESUS OPERATED OUT OF WAS A SENSE OF PLENTY—THE GLASS HALF FULL. JESUS LOOKED AT THE SAME THINGS THE DISCIPLES LOOKED AT, BUT WHERE THEY SAW NOT ENOUGH; HE SAW PLENTY: PLENTY OF TIME, PLENTY OF FOOD, AND PLENTY OF POSSIBILITIES WITH THE RESOURCES AT HAND. WHAT JESUS KNEW FOR CERTAIN WAS THAT WHEREVER THERE WAS PLENTY OF GOD, THERE WOULD BE PLENTY OF EVERYTHING ELSE.

SO JESUS TOOK THE FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH FROM HIS DISCIPLES AND BLESSED THEM IN FRONT OF THEM ALL, PERFECTLY CONFIDENT THAT GOD WOULD TURN NOT ENOUGH INTO PLENTY. CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE TO WATCH HIM DO THAT? TO BE SITTING IN THAT CROWD, WATCHING JESUS BLESS FIVE LOAVES, AND BREAK THEM, AND GIVE THEM TO HIS DISCIPLES TO GIVE TO A CROWD THAT WENT ON FOREVER?

MOST BIBLES GIVE A HEADING TO THIS STORY THAT READS SOMETHING LIKE “JESUS FEEDS FIVE THOUSAND.” ACTUALLY, JESUS GIVES FOOD ONLY TO THE DISCIPLES, WHO THEN FEED THE OTHERS. WHILE IT IS CLEARLY THE MIRACLE OF JESUS THAT FEEDS THE MULTITUDE, THIS DOES NOT REDUCE THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP TO A CALL OF PASSIVE PIETY. OUR CALL AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST IS TO ACTIVE MINISTRY THAT MEETS HUMAN NEED. JESUS FEEDS THE TWELVE; THE TWELVE FEED THE FIVE THOUSAND.

THE PROBLEM WITH MIRACLES IS THAT WE TEND TO BE MESMERIZED BY THEM, FOCUSING ON GOD’S RESPONSIBILITY AND FORGETTING OUR OWN. MIRACLES LET US OFF THE HOOK. THEY APPEAL TO THE PART OF US THAT IS ALL TOO HAPPY TO LET GOD FEED THE CROWD, SAVE THE WORLD, DO IT ALL. WE DON’T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES. WHAT WE COULD OFFER WOULD NEVER BE ENOUGH OR MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE ANYWAY, SO WE HOLD BACK AND WAIT FOR A MIRACLE, LOOKING AFTER OUR OWN NEEDS AND LOOKING FOR GOD TO HELP THOSE WHO CANNOT HELP THEMSELVES. WE’RE HAPPY TO SIT AT HOME, WAITING FOR GOD TO ACT, WHILE WE HANG ON TO OUR OWN LITTLE LOAVES OF BREAD. BESIDES, WE DON’T HAVE THAT MUCH ANYWAY AND THE NEED IS SO GREAT. OR WE’VE ALREADY STEPPED UP TO HELP.....IT’S SOMEBODY’S ELSE TURN NOW.

LET THEM FEED THEMSELVES, SAY THE DISCIPLES. “THEY NEED NOT GO AWAY,” SAYS JESUS. “YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT.” NOT ME BUT YOU; NOT MY BREAD BUT YOURS; NOT SOMETIME DOWN THE ROAD OR SOMEWHERE ELSE BUT RIGHT HERE AND NOW. STOP LOOKING FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM AND SOLVE IT YOURSELVES. STOP LOOKING FOR FOOD TO FALL FROM THE SKY AND SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE. I WILL PERFORM THE MIRACLE BUT I NEED YOUR HELP AND RESOURCES.

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE HEARD GOD SAY, "GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT," AND BECAUSE OF OUR SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS TURNED AWAY? IF WE BELIEVE WE HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER, THEN JESUS HAS NOTHING TO BLESS AND WORK A MIRACLE WITH.

IF YOU WERE HERE LAST SUNDAY THEN YOU WITNESSED SOMEONE OFFERING EVERYTHING THEY HAD TO JESUS. LITTLE 3-YEAR-OLD COLTON CAME FORWARD DURING THE OFFERING TO PUT HIS CHANGE IN THE CHURCH BUILDING OFFERING. YET EVEN WHEN THE COINS HIS AUNT HAD GIVEN HIM WERE GONE, HE WASN'T DONE AS HE REACHED HIS TINY LITTLE HANDS DEEP INTO HIS POCKETS TO RETRIEVE ANY OTHER COINS HE HAD. HE DUG AND DUG AND DUG....LITERALLY GIVING EVERYTHING HE HAD. AFTER WORSHIP, HIS AUNT SAID SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHERE THE MONEY WAS COMING FROM OR EXACTLY HOW MUCH HE HAD BUT HE WAS HAPPY TO GIVE!

BRING WHAT YOU HAVE TO ME JESUS SAYS. HOWEVER MUCH YOU HAVE, JUST BRING IT TO ME AND BELIEVE THAT IT IS ENOUGH TO START WITH, ENOUGH TO GET THE BALL ROLLING. I WILL BLESS IT; MULTIPLY IT AND USE IT!

WHEN JESUS DOES TAKE THE FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH, HE BLESSES, BREAKS, AND GIVES A FORESHADOWING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER. THIS STORY IS ALSO TIED TO THE HOLY MYSTERY OF COMMUNION. IN THIS HOLY MEAL JESUS NOT ONLY GIVES US HIS OWN BODY AND BLOOD. JESUS TAKES, BLESSES, BREAKS, AND GIVES BACK TO US WHAT WE OFFER TO HIM, AND WE ARE CALLED TO GIVE IT TO OTHERS. WE OFFER WHAT LITTLE WE HAVE. JESUS TAKES OUR IDEAS, MONEY, TIME, TALENTS, ENERGY, ARTISTIC GIFTS, A SENSE OF HUMOR,

SKILL WITH WORDS OR WITH THE LAND, EVEN OUR LOVE. HE BLESSES ALL WE GIVE HIM,
GIVING IT ALL BACK TO US SO THAT WE CAN SHARE THEM WITH OTHERS.

LEFT TO OURSELVES, WE HAVE TOO LITTLE. JESUS TAKES WHAT LITTLE WE HAVE AND
MIRACULOUSLY MULTIPLIES IT: A SIGN OF GOD'S ABUNDANT GIVING. HUNGRY AND WEARY
WE MAY BE, BUT GOD NOURISHES US. BRING YOUR ENTIRE SELF TO COMMUNION THIS
MORNING, RECEIVING THE MIRACLE OF CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD; GIVING CHRIST YOUR
VERY SELF, TRUSTING HE WILL BLESS IT, MULTIPLE IT, RETURNING IT TO YOU FOR USE IN THE
ADVANCEMENT OF THE KINGDOM HERE ON EARTH.