

‘What Are These Morsels Amongst So Many?’

Jeremiah 1:4-10; John 6:5-15

August 25, 2019

There is no way to add enough drama to the reading of this story. It is one of the few that is recorded in all four gospels. The feeding of the 5,000 follows Jesus’ healing of a man who had been severely ill for 30 years. He couldn’t get to the pool of healing waters. It was the Sabbath. With a word, Jesus healed him. As you can readily imagine, Jesus is in trouble with the religious authorities. Listen to where you might enter into this reading...

There are many places to enter this story. We have the crowd of 5,000 who have scurried to follow Jesus. Are you one of those who have been in a rush this morning to make it to Homecoming, with your food, and your children, and camera, and everything you needed for this festive occasion? Are you amongst the 100s, even 1000s of people who set out this morning to worship God in a beautiful sanctuary?

Or do you identify with one of the twelve disciples? They aren’t exactly sure what to do in this situation. They feel a bit overwhelmed, perplexed, and at a loss for what to do next. Even if there was a local food mart where they might get some bread and juice, they surely don’t have enough money to get enough for this crowd. What are we to do, Jesus?

Maybe you have a glimmer of hope, like Andrew. “I saw a young boy sit down with a basket of food.” His mother might have known he would get hunger over the course of the day. Maybe his mother was even with him, curious too, about what Jesus was doing, what he might say...

Jesus told Andrew to go get that basket of food. When Andrew brought it, Jesus processed to our common words for communion: He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the people to eat. Then he took the fish, blessed it, broke it, and gave the pieces to the people to eat. Not only was there *enough* for everyone there, there were even baskets left over for the disciples to collect.

The amazing thing about this story is that we could enter as any of the characters: we could be one amongst the thousands, or we could be one of the disciples. I believe Jesus is hoping we will be one of the disciples, one of the hopeful ones like Andrew was in this story. One of those who sees somebody who has a little bread to share, has some extra money to work with, or someone who has an available car to drive someone to the hospital when they need extra care. Jesus is looking for the Doers, disciples like Andrew who have their eye out for how we can help, how Jesus can work with our hopefulness and how we can work together to perform acts of kindness and generosity. Because when we realize our love for Jesus is our common denominator, there is no limit to what we might accomplish together.

I had one of those unique, expanding experiences when I was in seminary. Many of you know that I received a Master of Divinity degree from the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY. One of the most invigorating parts of that study was that we could attend classes from any one of five seminaries and they all counted the same toward our graduation. One January, I studied at the St. Meinrad Monastery in Evansville, Indiana. The class was “The Consciousness of Christ,” taught by Fr. Stephen Happel. The class in itself was a great inspiration, and the whole living experience was even more inspiring. I actually had the privilege of living in the Retreat House normally used by the priests on special occasions. It was the first time they had ever let a woman stay on the campus, and I wasn’t even sure where I was going to live until I arrived. Regardless, as I packed before leaving Louisville, I loaded my stereo into the back seat of my car. This was the late 70’s, so my stereo was a big box, with a turntable, and two big speakers. One of my classmates saw me putting all this equipment into my car and said: “You are going to a monastery; you won’t need that stereo.” I chose to be prepared.

Soon after getting settled, going to class, and eating with all the various people: it seemed like there were three types of personalities. All the monks, professors, and students had a close-knit community, definitely pouring all their heart, soul, and body into learning about and following Jesus. That was their common denominator, for sure. But it also felt to me like there were three groups: the Academicians, who spent their time deep in study of the Bible, theology, and learning everything they could about Jesus. Then there were the Athletes, who lifted weights, played basketball, and took very good care of their bodies. Then there was a group of Party Goers. They were always laughing, joking, and certainly having a good time. All three of these groups did everything with great energy, gusto, and deep commitment.

Since I was living in this wonderful house, I had my stereo, and Friday nights were fun times to get together, I decided to have a party. I invited everybody, and everybody came! As you might expect at the campus dining hall, people clustered mostly according to the athletes, the intellectuals, and the carefree students. But - when everybody was in this new atmosphere, they interacted more naturally. Still though - one of the students told me I couldn't really be from the Baptist seminary, because Baptists don't let women be ministers. Oh well...

Later, Brother Matthew pulled me aside. He said, "Hold your head up and go forward. You have a lot to teach these men." He wasn't talking about anything I would ever say, but just what my presence represented in helping them see beyond their stereotyping. Just like my friend back in Louisville said I wouldn't need a stereo at a monastery, and like my new friend at St. Meinrad had a pre-conceived notion about women in ministry, they were both mistaken. They were innocently naive, but needed to not be so quick about issuing judgments and confidence in what they thought they knew.

We need to get back to our common denominator. As long as Jesus is our core reason for believing and acting, and he is our reason for being, it doesn't matter what the numbers are: he wants us all to be One. $4/4 = 1$. $7/7 = 1$. $100/100 = 1$. $1000/1000 = 1$. When our common love for Jesus Christ is at the core of our faith, everything we do can be blessed and expanded because of him.

The disciple Andrew saw a boy with a basket of some bread and fish, and with Jesus' blessing, it fed 5,000. When we connect with a person - or a congregation - that has a little hope, and trust that Jesus will bless us, there is no telling what we might accomplish. Jesus also wants us to be the Doers, working in one accord with those whose faith is grounded in him. When we agree on a good direction, then we need to go for it. If it fails, that's okay. But we have to think, pray, act, and try again.

What are these morsels amongst so many? Everything, when Jesus blesses us.