

Feeding Body and Soul

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John 6:1-9 (unison)

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people.

Now give your ear to the rest of the story...

John 9:10-14

***Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.***

I think any biblical story that has food in it grabs my attention. Eating is one of my favorite pastimes. I am a foodie and proud of it. I could go on and on about how I enjoy savory foods more than sweets, except for dark chocolate and cookies, but I digress from the message about food in our text.

While I enjoy a good meal, I am not sure why anyone in this country has to go to bed hungry. With all the food we throw away, because we don't like leftovers, why is hunger an issue in this country? With all the food we throw away from our gardens at this time a year, why is it we can't find a way to give more of it to those who need fresh fruit and vegetables?

According to Feeding America, 1 in 7 people struggle to have enough food to eat. Fourteen (14) percent of households (17.4 million households) are food insecure. While many Americans are eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and unprocessed meats, the gap is widening between those who have healthier diets and those with unhealthy diets. The gap mainly falls along lines of ethnicity and income. There is a reason Whole Foods is planning to build a new store right across the street from SFBC on Capital Hill and not in Rainier Valley.

If you are familiar with the scriptures, you already know that food is important in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Without food, manna, and spiritual nourishment we will die a slow painful death. As followers of Jesus we have a mandate to provide food, hospitality, and spiritual direction to those around us. We are to care for the physical and spiritual needs of our neighbors.

Tomorrow we will do just that as a congregation. We will take our hospitality to the street or at least to the parking lot and welcome the strangers in our midst as

well as welcome those we know. One of the scriptures I love in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 13. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels (unaware) or entertained angels without knowing it. So we are to always be kind to strangers and our visitors, for they may be angels sent to us for such a time as this.

In the lesson that we read today, there was a crowd of 5,000 people that needed something to eat before they went on their way. People had come to see Jesus because of the healing miracles he performed. Before they parted company, Jesus wanted to make sure they had something to eat. That is what a good host does before their guests leave. Here, like at the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples, he acted as the host. Except here he had 5,000 guests.

Jesus didn't have to feed the 5000. He could have turned his back on them and their need and walked in the other direction—like we sometimes do when we are distracted by our cares of the world. At times we see a problem ***or opportunity***, but we are so overwhelmed at the magnitude of the need that we see, that we pretend not to see. At other times we recognize the problem, but there are so many things demanding our attention that we turn our backs and walk away.

We have a serious homelessness problem in Seattle and I am grateful that our city leaders and many philanthropists are addressing this issue. Yet, there is something all of us can do around this crisis. But we are distracted by other needs. Rents are rising at an alarming rate in Seattle. Seniors are being booted out of their apartments so landlords can charge higher rents to newcomers. Many are working 2-3 jobs just to make ends meet. And, of course those working multiple jobs are part-time at all of them so none of the jobs pay benefits. You are doing your best to care for your children and the dog, all the while struggling to

pay your student loan debt of \$50K that's increasing daily with every missed payment. Crime is up and your car was broken into last week, and on top of all that you are supposed to do something about homelessness? Life is overwhelming at times.

Many of us are struggling with age related illnesses and never ending medical bills. And while a few have recovered from the great recession, wages have not kept up with inflation and purchasing power is down. In other words, a dollar doesn't stretch as far as it used to. Our 401K's and retirement funds are declining do to Brexit and the European Union crisis. In spite of an uncertain economy, we are to remember our church pledges and maintain our financial support of the church during the summer *and* on top of all that, give to those who have even less than we do. It is all overwhelming. Somebody say Amen. We are doing our best to keep all the plates spinning.

So, on top of working 2-3 jobs, managing our health (which in some cases is another full time job), caring for aging parents, ailing spouses, having very active children, financially supporting our church, and caring for the environment, NOW as a result of the mass killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Mother Emmanuel AME Church, Pulse night club in Orlando, and countless other mass shootings, we have to organize to take down the NRA and advocate for sensible gun legislation. And where, O God, do you expect us to find the time, energy, and resources to do all this? How is all of this supposed to get done?????

We can be so overwhelmed with life that there is no bandwidth to do any-thing-more. In our text, Phillip said, six months wages would not buy enough bread to feed all these people. There is no Costco, Sam's Club or Walmart out here. The need was just overwhelming to the disciples.

Then Andrew said there is a boy here with five loaves of bread and two fish. At least Andrew had open eyes to see what was in his environment that had potential. But any reasonable person would agree, that five loaves of bread and two fish won't go far with 5,000 people. The King James Version has Phillip saying, what are these among so many. In other words, what difference will the *little* that we have make in a world with so many needs.

Sometimes all we need is a kernel of an idea for a movement to take shape. The civil rights movement started when Rosa Parks was just too tired to give up her seat on the bus. She was not trying to start a movement. She was trying to get home on the bus. She was just too tired to move. She was thrown off the bus for disobeying the law and not giving up her seat to a white person. But, because of that small act of civil disobedience, walls of oppression and segregation were dismantled.

The disciples saw the gap—what they didn't have. They saw what they lacked when it came to feeding the multitude. They lacked a ton of food and they lacked an army of volunteers to serve it. But they didn't see what they had. Here me now—they didn't see what they had. They had five loaves of bread, two fish, and most of all—they had Jesus.

Jesus was already doing healing miracles. But the disciples didn't have the spiritual insight to see who Jesus really was. So, Jesus had the crowd sit on the grass. I love that detail—attention was paid to the comfort of those gathered. And, after they sat, Jesus took the bread and after giving thanks, he gave it to the people. Ah, where have we heard that before. We celebrate Jesus in the breaking of the bread every first Sunday through communion. And amongst this

crowd of hungry people, the power of the Divine was known in the breaking of the bread.

When we break bread with another, our bellies are satisfied, and our souls are nourished as well. We were not created to be solitary creatures. We need one another. We live in community. When one starts to isolate, trouble will soon follow.

Jesus initiated this miracle of having plenty in the midst of scarcity. Jesus also works in areas that are daunting to us—homelessness, gun control, hate, cancers, dementia, poverty, global warming, and the school to prison pipeline. Conventional solutions won't solve unconventional problems. We can't raise enough money to stop hate. The Spirit of love has to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

When all were finished eating and were satisfied, Jesus directed the disciples to gather up all the fragments. When they did, there was enough food to fill 12 baskets. When we give God the fragments of our lives, there will be more than enough love, ... hope,... homes to get people off the street.

When we give God the fragments of our lives, there will be more than enough healthy food to fight disease and malnutrition. We will have more than enough energy to manage the work of justice and hope. When we give God the fragments of our broken lives, we will have more than enough wisdom and courage to live every day for God. We may only have a little to offer for the healing of our land and the healing of our lives, but in the hands of the miracle worker, it will be more than enough.

So let us gather all the fragments of our lives and gather at this sacred table, and prepare to receive this sacred meal. You may remain seated for our communion hymn, #332 As We Gather At Your Table.