

## LUNCH FOR ONE, TABLE FOR THOUSANDS

Pastor Steven Molin

CLLC

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Pentecost 8

Matthew 14:13-21

Dear friends in Christ, grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to start my message this morning with a question; where do you go when you are weary and you need a rest? When you have worked too hard for too long, or when the mental stress of life has you exhausted, where do you go and what do you do? Some people simply retreat to their homes, to read or relax without interruption (this assuming that you don't have small children). Other people go to the golf course. Frankly, if I was stressed out, the last thing I would go is the golf course. Have you seen me play golf? The beautiful people go to Paris, or Aspen, where they abhor the paparazzi, but they smile for every picture.

So where do you go when you just need to catch your breath. If you are a real Minnesotan, you go Up North, to the lake. The Minnesota DNR says there are more than 122,000 lake cabins in Minnesota, and if you don't own one, you are related to someone who does. Last summer, Marsha and I visited her sister's family at their cabin in Pequot Lakes. Pequot: the town whose water tower is a fishing bobber, right? I love Kathi and Tony, but frankly...I should have gone to the golf course! Three days of talk, talk, talk, talk only increased my weariness, so I came home and mowed the lawn. Now there is mental retreat that works for me.

I mention this because, as we open our gospel lesson today, Jesus is seeking a retreat. In recent days he had debated the Pharisees, healed a demon-possessed man, and taught a half a dozen parables to crowds of people. But the last straw for Jesus was the news that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded by Herod. Now Jesus was physically and emotionally spent, so he did what any Minnesotan would do; he went to the lake. Even the Son of God needs to rest, and this ought to be a teachable moment for any of us. To be able to say "Stop! Enough!" To turn off the phones, unplug the computers, and tune out the needs of others, and rest. Selfishly, unapologetically, rest.

But Jesus fails at resting. As his boat sailed along lake and he looked for a deserted place to relax, the crowds follow on the shoreline, jogging along while

their collective eyes focused on the boat carrying Jesus. And when he finally pulled into a small bay on the Sea of Galilee, the groupies that he had left behind re-gathered and cried out to Jesus for his care. There were the sick that needed to be made well. There were the blind and lame that called out to be healed. There were the desperate who begged for hope. How do you say “no” to that? If you are a mother, you know the feeling. Someone once told me that a mother is only as happy as her unhappiest child. And this was true for Jesus, so he scraps his plan to rest, and he teaches, and listens, and heals, and loves for another long day.

And as the sun is going down, the disciples come to him and say “Jesus, send the people into town to buy food.” But Jesus says to them; “You feed them something.” We are told that there are 5000 men, but there are likely 5000 women and 5000 children as well. How in the world are the disciples to feed a crowd so great as this? They scared up a couple of perch and five dinner roles, but seriously, 15,000 people! Jesus tells the people to sit down, and you just knew something great was going to happen! He says a prayer, and the disciples start handing out lunches, and the food just keeps coming. “Looks like there are left overs” Jesus says, and so the disciples move through the crowd collecting food, and it fills 12 baskets. And I think Jesus looked at the disciples and smiled, and said, “I told you guys you could do this.”

The story of the feeding the 5000 is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Today, we read Matthew’s version, but I like John’s version best. John tells us that a little boy walks up to Andrew and says, “Hey mister, my mom made me this lunch...it isn’t much, but I’ll share.” And Andrew sheepishly says to Jesus “There’s a kid here who has five buns and two sardines, but that’s crazy! Look at all these people!” But in the hands of Jesus, that one lunch becomes enough. Here’s what I think happened...

When the people see the generosity of one little boy, they begin to take out their own stashes of food that they had packed for the day, and they start sharing. A loaf of bread here, a slab of cheese there, a flask of wine, a satchel of oranges. They could have focused on the scarcity of the food in their midst; a sandwich and an orange isn’t very much. But they chose to focus on the abundance of what God had provided; “Lord, thank you for this meal.” It was all a matter of attitude.

The question is, what was the real miracle that day? Was it that Jesus multiplied one lunch into a feast? I truly believe Jesus could do that! Or was it that Jesus softened the hearts of 15,000 people to share the little bit they had, so that all could have enough? Was it a one-time miracle to show the power of God, or was it more than that? Because I am wondering today what would it take for the world to have enough? Everyone in the world to have enough. A massive air-drop from God with many tons of food? A daily rainfall around the planet? Or would it be a heart that is changed from selfish to selfless; from “me” to “we”?

We live in a world where the needs are overwhelming. Half of the people in the world live on \$3 a day. According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die every day in poverty. More than 1 billion people do not have access to water, and 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation, which breeds disease and death. But it seems that our human nature convinces us that, if I have enough, life is good...and that’s what we seem to strive for.

Three decades ago, Christian songwriter Keith Green wrote a song with haunting lyrics, entitled “Asleep in the Light.” Here is a part of that song;

*Do you see, do you see  
All the people sinking down  
Don't you care, don't you care  
Are you gonna let them drown*

*How can you be so numb  
Not to care if they come  
You close your eyes  
And pretend the job's done<sup>1</sup>*

*The world is sleeping in the dark  
That the church just can't fight  
Cause it's asleep in the light  
How can you be so dead  
When you've been so well fed  
Jesus rose from the grave  
And you, you can't even get out of bed*

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<sup>1</sup> Green, Keith Gordon, Universal Music Publishing Group, Warner/Chappell Music

I think that song is a harsh and perhaps unfair indictment against humanity in general, and against the Christian Church specifically. I expect you are thinking the same thing I am thinking; that the problem is so great, the numbers of hungry and thirsty are so overwhelming, we don't even know where to start...so we don't. I get that, but I want to leave you with a story from writer Loren Eisley. Eisley had rented a home on the Pacific beach one winter, and he shares what he calls, the story of "The Dancer." He writes;

*I was sitting on the deck overlooking the ocean, and down the shoreline, I spotted a figure that seemed to be dancing, joyfully dancing at the water's edge. I walked down to the sand and toward the dancer, and the closer I got, the more I noticed that the beach was littered with starfish, lying on the sand. And then I realized that the man wasn't dancing at all; he was picking up starfish and throwing them into the surf. I said, "Mister, what in the world are you doing?" And he said, rather matter-of-factly, "I'm saving starfish!" I almost laughed. "Look at this beach! Look at this beach. There must be thousands of starfish lying here. You can't possibly make any difference." And the dancer bent down, picked up a starfish and hurled it into the ocean, and then turned and said, "Made a difference for that one."*

Made a difference for that one. Every time we share a meal with a starving child, we make a difference for that one. Every time we make a quilt and send it to a person in need, we made a difference for that one. When we place school supplies in a box for a child who cannot buy her own, we made a difference for that one. Every time we decide that we have more than enough, and we share so that someone might have just enough, we have made a difference for that one. And then we become part of the Jesus story; "Sir, I have this little lunch, and it isn't much, but I'll share." And Jesus will say, "Tell the people to sit down." Thanks be to God. Amen.

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