

February 18, 2024
Rev. Lisa Schrott
Luke 9: 1-6, 10-17
Not By Bread Alone

The sanctuary and Fellowship Hall look and sound a little different this morning than they did last week. Mardi Gras is over. We have been marked by ashes and have begun our journey to the cross and to the empty tomb – our journey to both death and resurrection. This Lenten season we will be considering the feeding stories in the Gospel of Luke – stories that speak to our hunger for food, for companionship, and for the presence of God. For as theologians Matthew Croasmun and Miroslav Volf remind us in the introduction to the resource we are using, *Hunger for Home*, "Scripture is also a feast." In scripture "God turns all our meals into invitations to eat in God's home—a home with a seat open for all who are willing. No longer is bread simply fuel for getting through the day, but also a call to be present to the agricultural workers, grocers, chefs, friends, and strangers with whom food connects us: everyone God is calling to the banquet."¹

So on this first Sunday with Lent, we begin with a story that might be familiar to some of you – the feeding of the 5000. It is one of the few stories that is found in all four of the gospels. We will hear the story as the Gospel writer Luke shares it, beginning with a preamble that sets the stage. We hear what Jesus and the disciples were up to before this miraculous feeding. If this story is new to you, I rejoice that we will share it together this morning. If this story is familiar to you, I invite you to open your heart and mind to hear it with fresh ears, especially in light of the actions to which Jesus calls his disciples before we get to the main story. Hear now these words from Luke chapter 9.

Then Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Jesus said to them, "Take nothing for your journey: no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." So they departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere. ...

On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. Then, taking them along, he slipped quietly into a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed to be cured. The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions, for we are here in a deserted place." But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said,

¹ <https://faith.yale.edu/new-landing-pages/the-hunger-for-home>

“We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And Jesus said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and had them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled, and what was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

My husband Brian shared a story with me that I have been pondering all week as I prepared for our Lenten supper and small group on Thursday night and the message this morning. He gave me permission to share it with you all. Brian grew up in Kansas City and his family vacationed every summer in Colorado. That meant a long drive across the state of Kansas at the end of the vacation. Brian and his two brothers in the back of the car, the adventure of the vacation fading with every mile of Kansas prairie they passed. About the only thing they looked forward to were the stops for food, being three growing and hungry boys. One year in their travels, timing was off and they missed the usual places they stopped to eat. Now this was more than a few years ago, and fast food joints were not yet at every exit on the vast stretches of I-70. And it was a Sunday night, in an era where restaurants weren't always open on Sundays. With three complaining boys in the back of the car – remember this was days before iPhones and DVDs – Brian's dad stopped in a little town in western Kansas, looking for some food for the family. They happened upon a church, all lit up on this Sunday night, holding a potluck dinner. Brian's dad Bernie goes in to check out the situation, leaving the kids and mom in the car expectantly waiting. Bernie comes back a few minutes later, gets in the car and starts it up. The family looks at him confused and Bernie says, “I told them that we were looking for a someplace in town to get a meal. They are having a potluck dinner and I asked if we could join in. They asked what we were bringing. I told them we were on our way home from vacation and didn't have any food to share. They told me, if I didn't have any food – we couldn't come to the potluck.” Brian's family eventually found an open restaurant, but that story stuck with Brian – an in your face – in your gut -example of the scarcity we – the church falls prey to too often.

And this is what Christ says to us: The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions, for we are here in a deserted place.” But Jesus said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and had them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled, and what was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

I think back on that day so long ago. The disciples were fresh off their journey through villages – a journey where Jesus told them to take nothing with them: no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic; a journey where the disciples were utterly dependent on the hospitality of strangers. And here, when they reunite with Jesus, excited to share their stories of the road, they find themselves surrounded by hungry crowds. They want to send the people away, want them to find their own provisions, to fend for themselves; not appreciating the irony of their recent dependence on the hospitality of strangers. In a world with a mindset of scarcity, believing in abundance can seem naïve and foolish.

The feeding stories in the Gospel of Luke are layered. They are indeed about ensuring that people receive sustenance – that those who have less means, that those who live with food insecurity are fed. We hear this in the very beginning of Luke’s Gospel, in chapter 1, when Mary rejoices for what God has done by blessing her as the mother of Jesus. Mary proclaims that through Jesus God will fill the hungry with good things. Jesus himself declares that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him because God has anointed him to bring good news to the poor. So yes, this passage is about our call to ensure that the hungry are fed, ministry we take seriously here at PCO with our work with the food pantry and food bank, with Advent House and with yes – the Loaves and Fishes in Lansing. And you will hear about an upcoming opportunity to support this ministry of feeding in our Minute for Mission this morning.

And yet the feeding of the 5000 and the other feeding stories in Luke’s Gospel are about more than “mere bread.” Scripture tells us that all who were there that day ate and were filled. The Greek word for “fill” used in this passage – **chortazo** – has rich connotations. It is used to describe the fattening of animals, as well as the state when your desires have been satisfied. The crowds had followed Jesus to this small town - in the other Gospels it is described as a deserted place – and Jesus welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed to be cured. Bread and fish were distributed and the people ate and were filled. They were deeply satisfied. The bread that filled their stomachs also filled their hearts and souls. It was more than mere bread, as theologians Matthew Croasmun and Miroslav Volf remind us. This bread was a promise- a promise of abundant life.

Jesus himself understood that promise. After Jesus was baptized, we hear how he, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he faced temptations and trials. Jesus ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’²

Jesus understood that our hunger is more than physical. Our hunger is relational. We hunger for God. We hunger for community. We hunger to be noticed, to be part of something bigger

² Matthew 4:1-4

than just ourselves. At the Lenten Supper and Small Group this week, someone commented that Jesus asked the disciples to have the crowds sit down in groups of about fifty each. No longer were they scattered individuals, anonymous members of the crowd. Now they were gathered together in a community, being fed together, being amazed at the miracle together, laughing, complaining about the weather and their aching joints. It was a “have a coke and a smile” moment, to steal the Madison Ave advertising buzz.

We hear this longing, for our hunger to be sated, in the passage Rebecca read from the prophet Isaiah. “Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ...Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.”

We long to believe the good news that there is room for us at the table. Room for us when our hands have delighted in baking fresh bread to share; room for us when a loaf of bread from the grocery store is what we can muster on a busy day; and room for us when our hands are empty and our spirits depleted.

Jesus took the bread and the fish, and blessed them and broke them and gave them to disciples to feed the crowds. And on the night of his betrayal and arrest, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and said, “This is my body. Take and eat. Eat this in remembrance of me.” Remember me when the days are long and the nights even longer. Remember I have called you by name and sent you out to bring the good news. Remember this table and those gathered around it. Remember that you are not sent out alone. You are gathered, fed the Word, and sent as my body in the world.

And all ate and were filled, and what was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. I like to imagine what became of those twelve baskets – of the people fed by the broken pieces. One basket given to grandparents caring for children they didn’t expect to be raising at this age, grieving the loss of parents caught in the mire of addiction; a basket to a family newly arrived in the area after fleeing oppression in their homeland, walking mile after mile in search of a better life; a basket to a graduate seeking to find their place in the world; and to a newly married couple filled with joy as they begin a life together; baskets given to the ones who always show up, who are always there to lend a hand, to set up tables and wash the dishes; and a basket given to three hungry boys and two tired parents on a road trip from Colorado Springs to Kansas City.

Eat these broken pieces in remembrance of me. Remember this table and those gathered around it. Come to this place when you recognize your hunger and thirst. Empty hands are welcome. God will feed you and you will be filled. Come to this place when you aren’t sure if you are hungry. Open minds are welcome. God will feed you and you will be filled. Come when you are sure you are already filled up. Full hearts are welcome. God will feed and you and you will be filled. This Lenten season may we acknowledge our hungers and we celebrate the abundance of God who feeds us. Amen.