

Sermon Pentecost 9B 25 July 2021
2 Kings 4:42-44; John 6:1-21
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you beloved of Jesus from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus asks, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Andrew replies, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Let's pray:

How often do you feel that there's just not enough to go around? I think we're all familiar with the story of Jesus feeding 5000 people in all with five barley loaves and two fish. But 900 years before this miracle, a similar event occurred during the days of the prophet Elisha [2 Kings 4:42-44]. On this occasion, the miracle wasn't on the same scale as the one Jesus performed, but it was still something otherworldly that must have left onlookers perplexed. And the point in both stories is the same: with the Lord, there's always more than what we can imagine.

Our way of thinking is often that we have nothing here but five loaves and two fish. I know exactly what that's like. The day I wasn't ordained alongside my classmates from Sem, was a five-loaves-and-two-fish kind of day. So was the day my best friend died. Sometimes when I consider Eric's situation or visit Kingsley, I feel like I have nothing but five loaves and two fish. And if there's one thing that confronts me with a concrete example of my five-loaves-and-two-fish feeling of inadequacy, it's realising that I don't have enough money in my pocket to buy a cup of coffee and something to eat for all of the homeless people I encounter.

Masks, social distancing, and anxiously watching the numbers feels like another five-loaves-and-two-fish existence. The unemployment numbers, job losses, business closures, suicides, and the rising

number of calls I receive asking for help, remind me that many people are living a five-loaves-and-two-fish life. And I wonder if my five loaves and two fish can do anything to feed the hunger for justice and dignity of the marginalised, vilified, dispossessed, and vulnerable, whom I should note are overrepresented by women and children.

In the five-loaves-and-two-fish times of my life I feel overwhelmed, powerless, hopeless, and agitated. I take on more than I can handle and I don't know what to do or say. I get anxious, sad, exhausted, and as I said, agitated. I want to scream at people to toughen up and fend for themselves, then flee to the mountains to be by myself. It's not just that I think I don't have enough, but I begin to believe that I'm not enough. I'm not enough to make a difference and I'm not enough to handle what's in front of me. When I was young, naïve, and idealistic, I was committed to saving the world. Some days now, I feel suffocated by it.

Does any of that sound familiar to you? You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

The question is: What are we to do in the five-loaves-and-two-fish times of life?

Well, what we must not do is sit around waiting for Jesus to give us more bread and fish, because the problem isn't a lack of bread and fish. It's a lack of vision for our lives, the world, and the future. It's a lack of imagination for what could be. It's a lack of compassion for others and just as importantly, ourselves.

We need to learn to see in a new way. We need new eyes and new vision. That's the challenge Jesus sets before the disciples when he asks, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He's asking us to change our thinking, change the lens, gain a new vision, and see with new eyes. Jesus sees and knows that we already are and have enough to feed the great crowd. Maybe that's what we need to see and believe about ourselves and each other.

So, I want us to think about today's gospel a bit differently than we usually do. The miracle is certainly an attention grabber, but what's behind the miracle? The people see a sign, a wonder, and want to make Jesus their king, but Jesus is already *the* King. What if it's more about seeing than feeding? What if it's less about bread and fish, and more about compassion?

Jesus and the disciples see the same crowd. But they respond very differently because they see differently. Jesus and the disciples represent two ways of seeing. The disciples say, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Whereas Jesus sees sheep without a shepherd and commits to doing something about it.

The disciples see the crowd and focus on the resources external to themselves. They do the maths - five loaves of bread and two fish; 5000 hungry stomachs. I reckon Lorna and the ladies would have a crack at it but there's simply nowhere near enough. And there will never be enough while we're doing the maths.

Jesus, however, focuses on his internal resources. He sees the great crowd and has compassion. He experiences their need at a gut level. He feels their hunger as his own. He sees himself as one of them. His insides are stirred up. It's an instinctive reaction like when our stomachs churn or we weep at the pain, loss, or need of others. Compassion is always the lens through which Jesus sees.

His compassion lets him see the five loaves and two fish as a possibility, not a limitation. Jesus isn't doing the maths; he's imagining the impossible being possible. He has no desire to send the crowd away. Rather, he's making room for them. He's seeing with the eyes of his heart.

What is it that keeps us from seeing and living like that? What if we learned to see with the eyes of our hearts? What if compassion was the lens through which we saw others and ourselves?

When we see the hunger, pain, or needs of others with eyes of compassion our priorities change, we imagine new possibilities, and resources multiply. Compassion calls us to speak up for and reach out to others. It means we say yes even before counting our loaves and fish. That's how I want to live! Walking by faith, not by sight.

I want to trust that my five loaves and two fish are enough and that they will make a difference. I want to believe that I'm enough and that I can make a difference. I want to see the world through the lens of compassion. And I want to act accordingly.

What's your compassionate vision for our country? For those who come to Australia and those who've always been here? For frontline workers, healthcare providers, and first responders? For teachers, parents, and school children? For those making decisions when there's no right answer? What's your compassionate vision for those who've lost jobs and businesses? For the homeless, the sick and dying? For those who are just like you and those who are very different? For those you love and yourself and your needs?

What is compassion asking of you today? How will you act on it? To whom will you reach out and for whom will you speak up? Look with the eyes of your heart and Jesus will show you who that is. Take a fresh look at what our lives and our country might become and Jesus will show you what to do.

What can you and I do with our five loaves and two fish? We won't know until we start feeding the crowd. That means stepping out in faith and we might just be surprised at what faith (which is love in action), is capable of. Let's stop doing the maths, and set the table.

Look around, my friends. Dinner's ready, there're plenty to feed, and with Jesus, there's always more than enough. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.



Fifth century floor mosaic in front of the altar in the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes at Tabgha, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel.

Image: https://www.biblewhere.com/wp_carta_blog/fifth-century-mosaic/?sfw=pass1626828823 accessed 21/07/2021.