

## Wonderful Stories, Wondering Crowds

John 6:1-21

*(preached July 28, 2024)*

Wherever Jesus went, he always drew a crowd. People came to see him work his miracles and to hear his stories and wise teaching. People brought their friends. – “Hey, how’s that back problem of yours? I heard about a guy who can really help people. The blind can see. Those who can’t walk are able to run. This guy, Jesus, is amazing. And he’s going to be in town on Friday. You want to come?”

So the crowds grew and they started following Jesus wherever he went. Like paparazzi stalking movie stars, everyone wanted to be near Jesus. And some people wondered if he could be the prophet that Israel had been expecting, the One to get them out from under Roman Rule. Was Jesus the new Moses who would bring them freedom? Was Jesus the new king to take back David’s throne and make Israel great again?

The signs were encouraging and today we hear about a major, awe-inspiring, crowd-pleasing miracle- the feeding of the 5000.

Even those folk not very familiar with the Bible probably have heard the phrase, ‘loaves and fishes.’ Nearly every major city has a food pantry or soup kitchen called ‘loaves and fishes.’ These ministries provide for those who are experiencing food insecurity. The nearest I could find was in Enfield CT but all over Massachusetts, all over the US you will find ‘Loaves and Fishes’ – where a little bit -donated by individuals and organizations- can go a long way in feeding hungry people. You know how that works with your own ‘Community Cupboard.’

As Jesus distributed his miraculous meal, the crowd was reminded of Moses providing food in the desert, bread from heaven. But that manna had to be gathered every morning and prepared just so. Now, Jesus simply said ‘sit down on the grass’ and the food was delivered right to the people! And not just bread! Fish as well. It was astounding!! And afterwards the people didn’t even have to clean up. While the disciples collected the leftovers, the crowd could just relax and chat and wonder at this extraordinary event. the Miracle of the loaves and fishes and the miracle of the leftovers! In Moses’ time leftovers were not allowed – manna would spoil if not eaten immediately. Jesus **must** be the Promised One, so the crowd became a mob and tried to take him by force and make him king! Jesus headed for the hills for safety, back to the mountain for some quiet time.

2000 years later and there are still people who would take Jesus and try to force him to support their agenda. Whether you are on the right or left, it is very tempting to claim

Jesus for your side! He will never let that happen, but we must understand that claiming Jesus for our side is a very human tendency. Beware!

2000 years later and there are still hungry people. Starving people. Not because there is not enough food, but because it cannot be distributed; because people will not allow the hungry crowds to be fed. You may have heard of the World Central Kitchen. This organization has served more than 55 million meals in Gaza, where Palestinians are under siege. World Central Kitchen also prepares and serves meals in the Ukraine. In the past kitchens have been set up to help victims of hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters in addition to war zones.

Jesus teaches us to have compassion on others. By his word and example we are called to serve. That's not news to you, but sometimes looking at the familiar in a different way, reveals something new, showing us how the past can speak to the present moment.

I invite you to join me in a brief time of imaginative prayer. (Breathe) There will be times of silence. Close your eyes or look down at your hands and let's imagine ourselves in the gospel story, as one of the 12 disciples. Remember they were ordinary people and far from perfect. Like us, they are trying their best to follow Jesus.

So here you are, a disciple in the middle of a grassy field. You're tired and hungry, but now you're faced with a ravenous crowd. Over the noise you hear Jesus ask; "Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat?" .....

A child comes forward with a lunch bag containing a few loaves and 2 fish. What good will that do? ....

You listen as Jesus gives thanks for that bit of food!

You watch him walk slowly through the crowd

And it hits you. He's made more food. ....

Jesus changed that morsel into a banquet for thousands.

And for you also.

Jesus hands you a loaf of bread and some fish and you are satisfied....

When Jesus says: "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost."  
you humbly obey....

As the days go by this week, I hope that you will revisit the story of the loaves and fishes. Read the story and put yourself in the place of other characters. Become the child coming forward with a lunch bag to share. Or a mother or father in the crowd,

just feeling helpless and hungry and worried. Perhaps even let yourself be Jesus, with everyone looking to you for answers. Or maybe even imagine that you are one of the fish, coming out of the lunch bag and seeing the light and love of Jesus setting you free to become more than you ever imagined. Let the Holy Spirit guide this unfolding in your mind. Then rest in God, and let God speak to you.

“Sometimes we can get so caught up in how something is possible that we forget simply to enjoy it. This poem by Mary Oliver invites us to accept the miracle, spoken with love, not just of the loaves and fishes, but of our very existence, which is perhaps the greatest miracle of all.”

### **Logos**

by Mary Oliver

(from the book “Devotions”)

*Why worry about the loaves and fishes?  
If you say the right words, the wine expands.  
If you say them with love  
and the felt ferocity of that love  
and the felt necessity of that love,  
the fish explode into many.  
Imagine him, speaking,  
and don't worry about what is reality,  
or what is plain, or what is mysterious.  
If you were there, it was all those things.  
If you can imagine it, it is all those things.  
Eat, drink, be happy.  
Accept the miracle.  
Accept, too, each spoken word  
spoken with love.*

Rev. Barbara Kershner