



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

July 19, 2009

Proper 11B

By Reverend Donna Barr

On this Sunday we encounter once again, "the most notable of all miracles." This story, the story that we call "the feeding of the five thousand" is the only miracle story that appears in all four of the gospels. We can imagine that it was a very important story for those in the early church --- and with good reason --- because it is likely that something very much like this actually happened during Jesus' time of ministry. This story, however, is interpreted a number of different ways --- But it's just enough to wet our appetites!

Today we have come face to face with food. To say the least, our culture has food on the brain. It might even be our truest national obsession. It seems we are always suffering from either too much or too little food. On the "too much" side we read the alarming statistics about the ill effects of being overweight – from diabetes, to hypertension and heart disease. Solutions abound! Watching calories, adding fat blockers and metabolism boosters – joining Weight Watchers, Atkins, Southbeach.....you know the self helpers! At least we can laugh at our overweight fetish and the need to remedy it through more and better techniques. "I've been on a diet for two weeks," said Totie Fields, "and all I have lost is two weeks."

On the "too little" side of the food issue – the darker side, there is a lack of food, not just worldwide, but also right here in America. According to the Food Research and Action Center In 2007, more than 36.2 million Americans live in food insecure households. Of these people, 23.8 million are adults and 12.4 million are children.

But where is the good news in the Gospel, beyond bringing into judgment our culture's way of dealing with food? The Rev. King Oehmig points out that, "Certainly one basketful of good news has to be that Jesus reveals to us a God who cares about the most elementary physical needs of people. Even eating. Nothing is too carnal for this God whom Jesus proclaims and reveals. Kingdom grace, the story points out, is simply an abstract theological concept, but, with Jesus, something that can be chewed and swallowed."

Yet the feeding miracle contains another revelation called the miracle of partnering with Christ.....or cooperation or collaboration.....or maybe just listening to God's call to love your neighbor. This miracle answers human need and comes with a willingness to partner with Christ in service. But if you noticed, this partnering comes at the end of a sequence of suggestions which "miss the mark." The disciples turn first *to the world* for the solution to the problem at hand. They tell Jesus: "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding villages and buy something for themselves to eat. Let them do for

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

July 19, 2009

themselves. Let them buy their own food! After Jesus rejects this he tells his disciples that they must go and feed the people. The disciples now turn to themselves to accomplish the task at hand. "are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it them to eat?" They look to their own resources in despair, as they are so small in light of such great need right in front of them. Turning to the world for a solution does not work. Turning to themselves for an answer does not work either.

What does work is the turning over of human resources and our own unique gifts to the power of God in Christ. Only when the disciples turn to Jesus, and lay before him their meager resources, only five loaves and two fish, does an answer present itself.

Today we welcome home to us, James Sutherland. As many of you are aware, James has been serving the people of the Phillipines for the last 8 months. I am sure by reading what James has sent us; he knows even more fully the miracle of laying his life and gifts over to God as a partnership in love. Jesus looked at the crowd with compassion.....James has looked upon those he has served with that same eye of mercy as he has served mothers and father, children, prisoners, people in need of medical help and those who are poor and hungry. In one of James epistles to us he shares, "We get to go to the feeding programs and not only physically feed young children but also spiritually feed them as well. When I see the smiles on their faces as they sing songs of worship it is very inspiring, and then being able to feed a hungry belly is very rewarding."

With gratitude to Barbara Brown Taylor, I end with her words for us all to digest.

"Stop staring at the crowd....go look at your loaves. How many do you have? Any answer will do....Take what you have, whatever you have---take it into your hands and hold it lightly, very lightly. Then bless it---thank God for what you have and make it holy by giving it away for love. Then break it----sorry, but you have to tear it up to share it, there is no way to keep it all in one nice piece. And finally, give it---to whoever is standing in front of you, beside you---spread it around, and never mind that there does not seem to be enough for everyone. It is not up to you to feed the whole crowd, to solve the whole problem, to fix the whole world. It is up to you just to share what you have got, to feed whatever big or little hunger that happens to be standing right in front of you. The rest will come.....for now, for your part, how many loaves have you? Go and look." *Amen*

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com