

“The Miracle of Giving”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor, Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA 7/25/2021

John 6:1-14

I love this story, the story of the “loaves and fishes.” It is a story of hope, a story of faith. I want to start with a confession this morning: I believe in divine miracles. I really do. I have witnessed things in my lifetime that I can only attribute to God’s divine intervention, and not with human help. And I do firmly believe that in this story of the “loaves and fishes” a miracle really happened. I had always heard it taught a certain way though, that God provided the extra food—no questions asked, no explanation given. We simply rested in the fact that God made it happen and the humans in this story are the recipients of God’s mercy, nothing more, nothing less. That thought is not a bad one at all, but has always been a shining example of God’s love for us. God provides for our needs.

But to be honest, I believe there is a lot more at play in this story than perhaps we really ever think about much. First of all there were a lot of people gathered there that day to hear Jesus, perhaps more than ever. Scripture tells us that there were thousands, and they were hungry and there was no food to feed them. The disciples and Jesus clearly see themselves as the people responsible for feeding this large crowd, but there is neither money nor food to do so. Eventually one of the disciples finds a boy with food. In this account it says he had five loaves of bread and two fish. That’s a lot of food for just a boy, so either he was selling the food or the food was for his family. If he was a food vendor, it was most likely for the benefit of his family, and of course if the food was brought there so his family could eat, then really the food was his family’s food. So, either way. It was most likely not the food of the boy’s alone; it was his family’s food—and there is little doubt that this was ALL the food they had, and I am so enamored by the fact that his boy offered it up. Something was going on. Something spoke into this boy’s very soul to be able to offer up not only all he had, but all his family had, to help feed the thousands of others there. This child had faith beyond what most of us have seen in our lifetimes. He had faith that God would use of all he had, and would take this small gift and use it to help the masses of people there that day. What amazing faith!

Then something crazy happens. Jesus takes this small amount of food and gives thanks to God in front of the crowd, breaks the bread into pieces and hands them out, with the expectation that somehow this small amount of food would feed everyone. Can you imagine the faith? How? Why? Then, it says that everyone ate until they were full. I don’t get it. As a child listening to this story, I couldn’t understand how this amount of food could possibly fill such a crowd and then it says that there were even twelve baskets of leftovers. What???? Even as an adult, I had simply written this off as another unexplainable mystery. But, now, not so “unexplainable.” I have come to realize there is a lesson imbedded here that must not be ignored. The miracle can be seen as God providing, no questions asked, or I believe an even greater miracle could likely have happened but is rarely discussed: That after the boy gave all he had, so did all the people. It took the faith of a child to inspire the adults to give all they had too, and by the time the food had been passed around, with the contributions of all the others, everyone was full, and there was even leftovers. That is the miracle, as I see it now as an older adult. The miracle was how everyone contributed so that all could be fed. And may we do the same. Shalom.