

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 8th 2016

John's story of Jesus feeding a large crowd is similar to Mark's story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. There are some details that differ but essentially they seem to set forth the same view of Jesus and his disciples. First, there is a large, hungry crowd. In John, Jesus asks his disciples where they can get food for the people. In Mark, the disciples ask him if they should dismiss the crowd to go get food. In Mark, Jesus tells his disciples to give them something to eat. The response of the disciples is the same in both stories: we do not have enough money to buy food for all of these people and, besides, where would we get the food if we had the money? Next, in Mark, Jesus asks them what they have. In John, the disciples tell them what they have. In both accounts, it is not much – five loaves and two fish. Next, Jesus has the people sit down. Then he takes the food they have, blesses it (gives thanks), and then gives it to the people to eat through the hands of his disciples. Everyone eats their fill and then the leftovers are picked up and they amount to more than they had in the beginning.

This story speaks powerfully to disciples of Jesus today who often find themselves in ministry situations exactly like this one. Service to others often leaves us feeling like Jesus' disciples: there are so many people, so many needs, so many things to get done. How can we minister to these people? Perhaps you see a problem in your community that needs to be addressed but it is simply so much larger than anything you could personally handle. What does Jesus say to us? You give them something to eat, you take care of them, you handle it. And our response is, This is impossible. We do not have what it takes to minister to these people. So Jesus asks, What do you have? First, it is always good to realize that problems we tackle are bigger than us and that we cannot handle them on our own or even if we got a couple hundred other people to help us. We just do not have what it takes to solve the problem. On the other hand, Jesus wants to know what we DO have and it is good for us to answer that question, too. Frankly, it often looks like five loaves and two fish in the face of five thousand hungry people.

Yet, I give what little I have into the hands of Jesus and he blesses it, gives thanks for it, multiplies it and then gives it back to me. And miraculous things happen. People get ministered to, communities see change, the downtrodden are lifted up – all eat their fill and are satisfied. I used to be an on-call chaplain for a hospital. They called me when someone had died or was dying. Each time, as I drove to the hospital, I would pray that the Lord would give me what I needed to minister to whoever was on the other side of that door. Honestly, at 3:00 in the morning, I frequently had little or nothing to give. But Jesus always took what I had, blessed and multiplied it, and people were helped. On my way home I always marveled at how he could handle the biggest problems when I just gave him what little I had. I would go home with leftovers, too.

During this Easter season may we offer to Jesus what, if anything we have, trust him to do something with it, and be prepared to see miracles.

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