

2 Samuel 11:1-15
Psalm 14

Ephesians 3:14-21
John 6:1-21

We read another miracle story today; the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. It is the only miracle story that is told in all four gospels, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. How wonderful. Too bad we cannot do that today, or can we?

Can you imagine how a church would react if the pastor notified the congregation that the following Thursday the church would be feeding 5,000 hungry people? The Mission Committee is going to object. We are a small committee, we cannot feed 5,000 people. Are you nuts, pastor? The Finance Committee will also object, Do you know how much it will cost to feed 5,000 people. At least \$40,000 to \$50,000! Where are we doing to get that kind of money? Pastor, you're crazy. The Buildings and Grounds Committee will object to having so many people trampling on the grass and the landscaping. Do you know how much trash that will produce? Who is going to do the cleaning? Forget it preacher! The church janitor will demand some help with the cleaning. The Worship Team does not offer an opinion because they are busy preparing for Lent. Overall, the people might say, "Preacher, we did not sign up for this." Most churches set a few reasonable goals, set some workable plans, and do what they can with the meager resources they have. Feeding 5,000 hungry people? That is another story.

Honestly, those responses are not too far from the responses the disciples gave to Jesus when he tells the disciples to feed this hungry, rag tag bunch of people. These people had heard about Jesus. His popularity is growing. A large crowd was following Jesus, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick" Jesus inquires where

they will get the money to buy enough bread for every one? Philip says that not even six months of wages would pay for it all, which was just another way of saying we cannot afford to do it Lord. Andrew tells the Lord that there is a boy there who has five barley loaves and two fish. But that is not enough to feed large crowd of 5,000 people. The disciples probably were thinking, "Are you nuts, Jesus?"

But Jesus instructs the disciples to have the large crowd seated where they were, and the five loaves of bread and two fish were divided up, and they went to feed the crowd. When you think that the vast majority of people worked hard each day, they were probably very hungry. I would imagine there were a lot of teenage boys in the crowd who could really eat. And yet, they were all fed, fed with five leaves and two fish. When the people are done, the left-overs were collected, they filled twelve baskets with leftovers. I'm glad they did not come to my house with those leftovers.

Jesus fed these 5,000 for Jesus was a man of compassion. This passage informs us that the crowds followed him for they "saw the signs that he was doing for the sick." Jesus was constantly helping people. He made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk. He cured people of leprosy and a woman who had been hemorrhaging for years. He raised people from the dead; exorcised demons, and forgave people of their sins. And now he fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. But he had an advantage over us. He could do miracles.

The disciples saw the need, but they could do no miracles. They were overwhelmed by the need, they said, "There is no way we can feed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish." We find ourselves in the same boat. We cannot do miracles. We look at the needs of the world today, and declare there is no way we can

meet every one's needs. 795 million people in our world do not have enough to eat. 1.4 billion people live on \$1.25 a day or less. 1.7 billion lack access to clean water. Here in our own nation, almost 50 million Americans live in food insecure households. In January, 2014, 578,424 people were experiencing homelessness. Here in Lincoln, nearly 1,000 people were homeless; nearly one-third were children under the age of 19. Those statistics are overwhelming. With statistics like that, we find ourselves paralyzed instead of empowered. Rather than moving toward action, we are tempted by inertia. There is overwhelming need and few resources. Like the disciples, we too may respond, "How can we meet such a large need?" And yet Jesus asks, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus is asking us to make a difference.

Cheryl Bridges John, a pastor gives two illustrations of people who have made a difference. In 1946 Mother Teresa came face to face with the masses of suffering and dying in Calcutta. She experienced a call to serve those suffering the most. With a passion she began the Missionaries of Charity, a small order of thirteen members. In the following decades, the order grew to thousands of members giving care in many orphanages and charity centers. Her little start now helps thousands, tens of thousands, of people.

The other illustration is one that we are participating in again right now. In 1976, Millard and Linda Fuller began Habitat for Humanity International. At that time there were few resources and a great need for affordable and decent housing for the working poor. With few resources, it would have been easy to ask "What can we do in the midst of so much need?" Yet their passion for justice compelled them forward. Today Habitat for Humanity serves as a clear witness to the multiplying power of Jesus' compassion.

Since its founding they have built or repaired more than 1 million homes, with more than 5 million people now living in Habitat homes. Here again, a small, modest start has given home to over 5 million. And you have had a hand in that. Yes, our little efforts may not seem significant. However, the point is that a whole bunch of us, each doing what may seem to be insignificant work, easily becomes a major accomplishment, maybe even a miracle. Over 1 million homes, over 5 million people acquiring homes, a few people at a time.

You may have heard the starfish story that is adapted from *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eisley.

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!"

Now to the Holy One who is at work within us,
accomplishing far more
than we could ever ask or imagine,
to God be all glory
in the church and in Christ Jesus,
now and forever. Amen.