

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July 25, 2021

Text: John 6:1-21 "The Feeding of 5000"

"One Person's Generosity Can Spark a Miracle"

In the award winning foreign language movie, *Babette's Feast*, set on the desolate coast of Denmark, the daughters of a devout clergyman, who preached salvation through self-denial, continued to live out his legacy after his death. The sisters sacrificed their youthful passions their whole life for the faith and duty to their father and the church... almost to the point of idolizing their father. One scene early in the movie shows the sisters doing their duty by feeding the shut-ins in their community with bland soup.

But then comes Babette, a mysterious refugee from France's civil war. Babette, unbeknownst to them, is a gourmet French chef. Her presence changed the whole town through her positive attitude and food. Even the soup she made for the shut-ins was received with delight and smiles. Babette finally convinced the pious sisters to let her share a gourmet French feast with them and some invited guests. She received a check... some extra money... while in the village from the French lottery and wanted to bless others with a feast. It was a scandal to the elders. But everyone showed up at Babette's Feast and tried to deny how good everything tasted. They even made a pact to keep quiet during the meal. Except one of the guests, from outside the village, kept sharing his delight out loud. The turtle soup even reminded him of a French restaurant back in Paris. In the end, the guests couldn't hold back how much they loved these earthly pleasures.

I have used this movie as a study in servant leadership. How one person can change the whole bunch just by sharing of themselves and their gifts. During the final feast in the movie, Babette does everything from behind the scenes. She never shows her face in the dining room to take credit, but orchestrates the whole evening from the kitchen. It is a beautiful movie that turns crabby people into joyful people through the gift of food.

If you haven't figured it out by now, our lessons today are about feeding people who are hungry. One of my professors from Wartburg Seminary, Dr. Craig Nesson, once wrote a book called "Give Us This Day" based on the petition in the Lord's Prayer... give us this day our daily bread. Daily bread isn't just for our mouths, but for the mouths of the whole world. In the book, he said something I will never forget: According to the World Food Programme, every six seconds, a child under 5 dies of hunger-related causes. Feeding hungry people through the church and as Christians isn't just an option, it's a Biblical Mandate.

In our Gospel for today, we read the feeding of 5000 story. You know it... right? Five loaves and 2 fish feed over 5000 if you include women and children. It is a miracle story found in all four Gospels. But the one we read today is a little different than the synoptic gospels.

In John's Gospel, however, it is the only one that includes a boy bringing his own bread and fish forward. Remember, one person can change the whole bunch. He was willing to let go of his own food and his food security.

Jesus seeing the need to feed the crowds that were following him asked Philipp to test him. "Where are we going to buy bread for these people to eat?" Philipp responded 6 month's wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." But Andrew found a boy who had five barley loaves and two fish. But he saw it from a human perspective, "What are they among so many people?" I call this the scarcity mentality. This will never feed the people. Or maybe they are just realistic.

And what's the significance of barley? In Jesus' time, barley bread was known as the bread of the poor.

Jesus made the disciples have everyone sit while Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks. In this gospel Jesus distributed the bread and fish himself until everyone had as much as they wanted. In the other Gospels, Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit and distribute the food.

Jesus also cared about the leftovers. He had the disciples gather up the fragments so “nothing may be lost.” Jesus cared about the distribution and wastefulness. So they gathered up enough fragments to fill 12 baskets. Jesus gives enough and a little more.

How many of you catch yourselves thinking your gifts aren’t good enough to share? Or that someone else has better gifts to share? How many of you feel so overwhelmed by world problems that you shut down and don’t do anything? We have all been there.

If you take anything away from this message today, it should be that your gifts, no matter how big or small, can make a difference. It can even spark a miracle. You just have to put it forward like the boy.

Let us learn from Babette or the boy in the gospel not to doubt the power of God to use our gifts to bless others and inspire others.

Look at the gift below me. This pantry that will go outside on Lennox Street. It is a blessing box. You can take from it or give to it. Thank you to Ken Schmidt and the Serve and Reach committee for commissioning this project. We can now expand our food distribution, even by a little bit. Every little bit matters.

Today, Jesus shares a meal with us of bread and wine or grape juice. It doesn’t seem like much, but with it comes the forgiveness of sins... of all the times we doubt our gifts or God’s ability to multiply our gifts.

May you walk away from this meal completely full, ready to let your cup overflow to bless others!

Amen.