

## Ruler of All Nature

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 24, 1994. Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 14; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

The miracle stories are the headlines of John's gospel. They signal dramatically and vividly the key messages that the evangelist is sending out for all to hear. The feeding of the 5000 is a boldface, front-page headline in this gospel, announcing the all important fact that Jesus is the Bread of Life.

The story of this miracle pictures Jesus at the center of a huge hungry and tired crowd. They've followed Jesus for miles. In the process, they've ignored everything - including food. So now they surround him. They need food for their bodies as well as nourishment for their souls. And the point of the story is that Jesus more than satisfies both their needs.

*Sufficiency* is the word that captures the message of this story: the sufficiency of Jesus and our sufficiency, not in ourselves but in and through Christ, to do the mission that Jesus has for us.

First, the sufficiency of Jesus. ~~Jesus stands in the center of the crowd as God's all-sufficient representative, who feeds every human hunger and meets every human need. There's no choosing here between bread for the stomach and food for the soul. Physical needs and spiritual needs are combined together in Jesus. Filling empty growling stomachs is one of the ways he conveys his great love for humanity and shows that he's also ruler of all nature.~~

~~Jesus is in full charge in this story. It's almost as if the miracle of the~~

~~feeding of the 5000 is a part of a carefully laid plan.~~ John says that Jesus knew all the time what he'd do. But just to test his disciples, he asked, "Where are we to buy bread to feed all these people."

Philip answered, obviously without a clue as to what to do, "200 denarii or about five hundred dollars would not be enough money to buy bread so everyone could have a little."

But then Jesus stopped his testing and took charge. "Make the people sit down," he commanded. Then he took the ~~seant~~ provisions, lifted the loaves and gave thanks and distributed them to the people. He did the same with the two small fishes, and the crowd feasted, eating all they want. And then, just to make the point crystal clear, Jesus ordered that the leftovers be picked up, and 12 full baskets were gathered. Jesus is the all sufficient Savior.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 can't be explained, but it can be experienced. John relates this miracle to the sacrament of Holy Communion. Here we and millions in the world experience the all-sufficiency of Jesus. ~~When we, in faith, respond to Christ's invitation to the Sacrament of Holy Communion and eat and drink the body and blood of Christ, the pain and sorrow of our sin is overcome and our fear is transformed into hope.~~

What Christ objectively did on the Cross through his body and blood, is subjectively appropriated by us when, in faith, we receive the bread and the wine as the body and blood of Christ. The death of this one person who is both God and Man is sufficient to provide salvation for the entire world. In the Sacrament of

Holy Communion, we experience a miraculous feeding.

But the story of the feeding of the 5000 not only describes the sufficiency of Jesus to feed us with his body and blood; it also says something about us. It's an affirmation of our sufficiency to do what's required of us in God's mission in the world when we let Jesus use all the meager resources we have, whatever those resources are. Andrew breaks in on Philip and Jesus with the report that there's a boy in the crowd with five barley loaves and two small fish. And then, as if he's embarrassed for mentioning it, Andrew adds, "But what are they among so many?" Yet, in the hands of Jesus, these meager resources, blessed and distributed to many, became all-sufficient for the purposes of God.

~~Whether we're a minister, a youth group leader, an elder, a deacon, a Sunday School teacher, a Daily Vacation Bible School teacher, a choir member, a member of the building committee or in charge of fund raising or a parent, spouse, employee or employer -~~ Not many of us feel sufficient in all the commitments that press on us. And I hear God telling us in this story of the feeding of the 5000, "In spite of ~~all we are not, in spite of~~ our inadequate resources, what we have is sufficient for God's work in the world." God promises to gather up our meager resources and through the power of the Holy Spirit to miraculously multiply them.

*Sometimes our sense of inadequate resources paralyzes us. This story tells us that our resources are sufficient for God's mission in the world.*  
~~This confidence in our own sufficiency to play a role in God's mission in the world is especially important when we remember that the message of this miracle~~  
*This is especially important to realize when we remember that the message of this miracle*  
is about physical hunger. Jesus cares about hunger. The Bible leaves no doubt that hungry people are the special focus of God's concern. ~~But sometimes we feel paralyzed when we see how what a hungry world we live and question if we can do anything to change the situation.~~  
*But sometimes we feel paralyzed when we see how what a hungry world we live and question if we can do anything to change the situation.*

The fact of world hunger is one of the most distressing and depressing realities of our modern world. Biblically speaking, hunger ~~can't be regarded~~ <sup>is</sup> solely ~~as~~ an international issue or a political issue or an economic issue. ~~It must be~~ <sup>regarded</sup> fundamentally ~~as~~ a religious issue. Jesus cared about hungry people - people who were physically hungry and people who were spiritually hungry. We, who are his disciples share Christ's concern.

It's always been difficult for most Americans to imagine hunger. Food is relatively cheap in the United States. But most of us are slowly becoming aware and concerned that we live on a very hungry planet. How hungry? ~~Statistics vary,~~ <sup>but one food science professor at Michigan State University said about 10 years ago,</sup> "There are 1.2 billion well-nourished people on the globe and the rest, 2.5 billion, <sup>(2.5 billion)</sup> ~~who~~ are underfed and malnourished." This great crowd, beckons us Christians to action.

"One of his disciples, Andrew,... said to Jesus, 'There's a lad here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?'" We can easily share the frustration, ~~the embarrassment,~~ <sup>and even the anger</sup> of Andrew as he comes forward with his ridiculous pittance in the presence of 5000 empty bellies. But Jesus didn't laugh. He took the offering. Its significance was not that it was small, but that it was all that was available, and it was given freely. And with prayer and power, Jesus multiplied these meager resources and made them sufficient.

Sometimes we get discouraged at how little we have and how meager our

resources are. ~~That's so in our homes when the money runs out before the bills are paid. It happens here in the church as well.~~ But if we would just let Jesus use whatever gifts we have <sup>we'd</sup> ~~we would~~ see Christ work miracles through us. All of us have a contribution to make to Christ's mission. Christ desires to use the meager resources that we have to accomplish his mission.

But where do we start?

We can start by becoming more informed about the urgent human need of hunger. The causes are complex. They include ~~the breakdown of ancient agricultural customs~~, misguided political policies, the concentration of land and wealth in the hands of a few, ~~the conversion of national farmlands by commercial interests to grow cash crops for faraway markets~~, wars, inadequate ~~and inappropriate~~ <sup>α</sup> technology, tribal conflict, ~~ignorance, neglect, and hunger itself~~, ~~which like a vicious downward spiral produces more hunger~~. Loving our neighbors begins by knowing their needs.

We can become more informed as to what our church is doing, in the name of Christ, to feed hungry people in the world spiritually and physically. Through the church we are digging wells, building dams and starting herds, teaching new agricultural techniques <sup>as well as</sup> ~~and~~ preaching the Gospel.

We can walk in the CROP walk this fall or pledge money to someone who is walking.

We can bring canned food in to deposit in the box at the back of Fellowship Hall - food that will be distributed to members of the community by the



Neighborhood Services Center.

*We can volunteer to deliver meals on wheels.*

And we can become advocates for the hungry people of the world in our own country. A special burden we bear as U.S. Christians is the fact that although our country is one of the nations rich enough to help others, our per-capita assistance to the hungry ranks toward the bottom of the list of affluent countries.

We may feel that what we have to offer is so little - but who knows what Christ can do with the meager resources we have?

Let us pray: Gracious God, you have placed with the hearts of all your children a longing for your Word and a hunger for your truth. Grant that, believing in the One whom you have sent, we may know him to be the true bread of heaven and food of eternal life, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen.