

11.20.2016 Sunday Next Before Advent (John 6:5-14)

The Saturday morning breakfast is always a popular topic of discussion at Sunday morning services. The breakfast that we cook at the Salvation Army kitchen and provide for those in need in our community is evidence that by the grace of God we are striving to show forth His praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to His service. Every Saturday morning at 5:30 members of this church proclaim their love for God by getting out of bed to go love their neighbor. Could there be a more fitting topic to discuss in the house of God on Sunday morning than how we long to show our love for Him?

During the announcements we've heard many different positive and enthusiastic comments about breakfast. Members have talked about how many people were fed, the great fellowship that took place, and how good the French toast looked, but one thing we don't seem to talk about on Sunday morning is the other side of that coin – how much hard work it takes to prepare breakfast for a group of 100 people. To feed a crowd that size you have to crack and scramble dozens of eggs, cook many pounds of bacon, and flip a lot of French toast. It's not easy and with Thanksgiving just a few days away it's certain there are a few people here today that have been thinking about the amount of preparation and effort that will go into that meal. The fact is it's difficult to feed a large group of people.

With that thought in mind consider how our Gospel reading, the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, takes feeding a large group of people to an entirely new level. Imagine living two thousand years ago as a disciple of Jesus Christ. You're one of His closest followers and you've been travelling around the Middle East teaching, preaching, and ministering. You have money (John 12:6) to help cover your day to day needs, but you are basically homeless. Like Jesus said, "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head*" (Matthew 8:20). The crowd of people following your Lord

has been growing and today the men in that crowd number five thousand – that’s just the men. When you add women and children to that number the crowd is perhaps closer to ten or even fifteen thousand people. As you stand there looking out upon this great multitude of people you overhear Jesus say to Philip, “*Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*”

The Scripture tells us that Jesus asked this question to test Philip “*for He Himself knew what He would do*” (John 6:6), but this side of heaven finite man cannot comprehend the thoughts and ways of His infinite God. So “*Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*” In other words, Jesus, we can’t feed this crowd. Then “*Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*” This miraculous account is so familiar to us and we know how this story ends, so we wonder why Philip and Andrew would doubt, but would our answer have been any different? We’ve established the fact that even with food provided and ready to prepare it’s difficult for a few people to feed a group of 100 – imagine this small homeless group providing for and feeding 100 groups of 100.

Jesus knew what He would do, but the disciples did not. The disciples were thinking in terms of what their bag of money or a boy’s lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish could provide. They were relying on that which fallen man constantly turns to: human reason and what they have learned from their own human experience. This doesn’t necessarily reflect negatively on them. It simply points to the Creator/creature distinction. It reminds us that no man can know the hidden mind God. Jesus knew that this was the right time and the right place for this miracle, but He had not yet revealed that to His disciples – so they did not.

That’s a good lesson for us to learn as well. We do not know about God

what He has not clearly revealed in Holy Scripture. That is such a good lesson for us because as Anglicans, we are the historic branch of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church that is most dedicated to the exclusive use of Scripture for doctrine, discipline, and worship. We believe the Bible is God's Word Written – a record of Himself for our sake and that this “Book of Books” contains all things necessary for salvation, but the pages of Holy Scripture certainly don't contain all the information about God that we would like to possess. We want to know more. Unfortunately that fact makes us a lot like our first parents. As they stood under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they wanted to know more, they wanted to know it all, they wanted to be like God, and they ended up believing a lie that brought blood, sweat, tears, and death into this world.

We must resist the temptation to want to know more than what God, through Holy Scripture, has revealed to us, for this temptation often leads fallen man (through some personal interpretation of Scripture) to attempt to put words in the mouth of God. To do so is to trust ourselves instead of His Word and to deny our Lord. God has given us all we need: A clear record of Himself, all the information we need for salvation, and even the astounding promise of complete knowledge of Him at the time of His own choosing. As St. Paul writes, *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (1 Corinthians 13:12; consider also John 21:25).

Our Lord chose the time and place to feed the 5,000. Philip and Andrew had their doubts, but before the sun set the Son of God would extinguish those doubts (at least for a day) by using a little boy's lunch to feed a great multitude of people. We have our doubts as well – it is truly a daily battle. Like the disciples we are often faced with difficult questions. The question may not be, *“Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”*, but the questions we face are no less difficult – no less worthy of a miraculous response from God.

We need a miracle and Holy Scripture has shown us that the Son of God

knows the perfect time and place to perform one. We must open our hearts, our souls, and our minds to that truth. A disciple of Jesus Christ does not know the hidden mind of God, but we know what He has clearly revealed in Holy Scripture. Jesus clearly said, *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him”* (John 6:51, 53-56).

This is the miracle our Savior performs today – a miracle infinitely greater than multiplying loaves and fish. This may feel like just another ordinary day, but it is not. This Divine service may feel so routine, so un-miraculous, but it is not. The disciples of Jesus Christ witnessed a miracle two thousand years ago in which a great multitude of people were fed, and clearly this is not that, this is infinitely better. This is Holy Communion! This is a true and heavenly feeding of food that nourishes for all eternity - food that is free for us because of the price the Son of God paid on the Cross. May we, by the grace of God, be led by His Spirit to a greater understanding of the unimaginable miracle that takes place at His table and worthily by faith receive the spiritual food of His most precious Body and Blood.