

Pentecost 9

So Matter-of-Fact

Text: Matthew 14:13-21

What a contrast to last week's sermon text! Then we heard St. Paul's bold and enthusiastic declaration, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us; for I am convinced that neither death nor life. . .nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is a thrilling and courageous statement of faith.

But quite a contrast to today's famous account of the feeding of the 5000, as narrated by St. Matthew. It is unemotional and almost matter-of-fact. Essentially the Evangelist gives us just basic, unadorned statement of the facts without any elaboration.

Here they are. When Jesus learned that John the baptist had been beheaded, he went off by himself to a deserted place. That's all. We're not told about his grief or mourning. No words of his are recorded. He went off by himself, presumably to pray as he often did, but we're not told what.

Crowds followed him and he compassionately cured their sick. But again, we're not told anything about the crowd's reaction to the healings, as we often are elsewhere when folks are amazed and praise God.

It was evening, Jesus had finished his ministry of teaching and healing for the day, and it was time to eat. So the disciples suggest he send the crowds away to find something to eat. Jesus tells them to give them something to eat. They explain that they only have five loaves and two fish. Jesus tells the crowd

to sit down on the grass. Then he takes the bread and fish, blesses them, breaks the loaves, and gives them to the disciples to distribute among the people. Everyone eats his fill. And there are lots of leftovers, twelve baskets full. Oh, and there were about 5000 men, nobody bothered to estimate the number of women and children present.

That's it. Jesus doesn't talk about the miracle, we don't hear about any reaction by the disciples, and, strangest of all, there's not a word from the 5000 plus who were fed, who benefited from the miracle.

This phenomenal event is presented in the most matter-of-fact way, by Matthew, Mark and Luke. It's only in St. John's Gospel that we hear the reaction of the crowd who witnessed this sign and said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14).

But I'm going to stick with Matthew's account today and ask what it means for us. What do we learn from it?

Well, here's my take, this time around. Every day you and I experience a similar miracle and hardly think anything of it. We seldom say a word. It's become so common-place that we almost take it for granted. It's the miracle of having so much to eat that we usually even have left-overs, in a world in which that isn't the norm, among millions who would consider any meal at all a miracle.

This fall our congregation will join with others throughout our synod in taking up a special offering to alleviate world hunger. The goal for our synod is half a million dollars. You'll hear more about this special effort in the next few months.

In today's Psalm we said, "The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:15-16). But that only happens when we do our part, if we share from our abundance. In today's Gospel the disciples have an active role to play. They take what Jesus has blessed and handed to them to distribute to the hungry crowd. Disciples still do that.

Deborah and I, along with other family members or guests at our table, pray the usual Lutheran table-prayer before every meal. But it is so routine that it's also become almost matter-of-fact. And we realize that we're just a couple in a huge crowd of millions who probably do the same.

And it's also true of other gifts besides our daily bread, blessings from God which hardly surprise us anymore, but for which we are most grateful, when we reflect upon them.

This account of the feeding of the 5000 is so understated, and so unemotionally presented, that it reminds us of God's presence in the seemingly ordinary. His care is there for us not only in the obvious, but much more often in the unseen, in the commonplace.

And His care is so regular, so routine, that we often fail to fully recognize it, or appreciate it and give thanks to him. We just receive his myriad daily blessings as though they were normal and to be expected, which, because of Christ, they are.

He's there for us, breakfast, lunch and dinner. When we're awake and when we sleep, throughout the routine of our lives, day after day, without interruption.

We pray "give us this day our daily bread," and he does. We pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," and he does. "Deliver us from evil," and he does.

Here's how Luther says it in his catechism. "I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from all evil. All this he does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him."

When Christ sat at table with his disciples the night before his crucifixion, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying, "take and eat, this is my body, given for you," and they probably had no idea at the time what he meant. Or "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin." And he continues to use ordinary bread

and ordinary wine for an extraordinary experience of his grace and mercy. So we regularly and routinely gather for much more than meets the eye, because the crucified and risen Lord is present to us as he has promised.

From today's Gospel we know that when Jesus is present, even a spontaneous picnic becomes a banquet, a hint of the heavenly feast which awaits us.