

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
August 28, 2010**

Matthew 14:13-21

Lessons from A Boy's Lunch

- 1. Amazing events in the wilderness*
- 2. Profound lessons for our life*

Hymns: 254 – 432

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Matthew 14:13-21 –

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was

about five thousand men, besides women and children.

I help with packing lunches at our house. I don't do it every school day, but on a number of mornings I take the initiative to do it. I have to admit, I don't think about much when I'm packing lunches. Oh, there are choices to make as to what to give our children – peanut butter and jelly, tuna, summer sausage, or cold cuts? Maybe an apple, banana, or grapes or a granola bar, a yogurt, or a couple of cookies? But I'm not really thinking too deeply about it; I'm just trying to get the job done.

Today, we need to think hard about a sack lunch. From our Scripture reading, we see that lunches were being packed long before you ever ate your first school lunch. I don't know who packed the lunch in our reading – this young boy or his mother – and I don't imagine deep thought went into packing it. Whoever packed that lunch of five small pieces of bread and two fish certainly had no idea that day what Jesus would teach through it.

Today, as we focus on the Gospel lesson from Matthew 14, let's focus on this boy's lunch and see the great lessons that Jesus taught from it.

1 – To do this, we need to review the details of what exactly happened that day. We read at the beginning of the account: "When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." What Jesus had heard about was the death of John the Baptist. Perhaps you remember how wicked King Herod had had John imprisoned and how he had then had him beheaded on a whim, because his stepdaughter asked for John's head on a platter. Jesus wanted some quiet time after hearing about this. Not only that, but his disciples were just back from a mission trip he had sent them on, and he wanted to talk with them about this. So they withdrew to the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee.

However, we then hear: *“Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.”* Jesus’ popularity at this time was extremely high. The crowd heard about his withdrawal and decided to follow quickly, because he had healed many of their sick during his ministry. They wanted more of this.

What does Jesus do? *“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”* Mark’s account says, *“He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”* Luke’s account tells us even more: *“He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing”* (v. 11). Despite needing some time to think and to pray, along with time with his disciples, Jesus couldn’t help but minister to these people by teaching them God’s Word and healing those that they brought who were sick.

Because the ministry that day went on and on, this created a problem. Our account continues, *“As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.’ Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’ ‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered.”* To get the full impact of this part of the story, it’s good again to see what the other accounts add:

- Mark 6: *“They said to him, ‘That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?’ ”*
- John 6: *“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he*

was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ‘Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?’ ”

The problem was created by the remote area where they were located. A look on the map shows that they were on the eastern side of the lake near Bethsaida, where very few people lived. Jesus used this as an opportunity to test his disciples. He asked Philip (who was from Bethsaida) where they were going to get food to feed all the people. Can you imagine the look Philip gave him? This would be a good episode of “Dinner Impossible!”

They had no immediate solutions. Yet we see that they’re good at math:

- Eight months’ wages wouldn’t give everyone one bite
- Five and two (loaves and fishes) won’t go far
- Crowd estimates put the people at about 5000 men, plus women and children
- They can do the math and count needs and shortfalls pretty quickly!

They come with a solution. “Send them away to get food.” The disciples were good at that. When little children were coming to be blessed by Christ and time was precious, their solution was, “Send them away.” When a Gentile woman came crying persistently after Jesus because her daughter was possessed by an evil spirit, their solution was, “Send her away.” Literally, the verb that’s used here is the same as the one for “divorce!” “Let’s cut the ties with them, Jesus!” they are saying to him.

Jesus has another solution: “ ‘Bring (the five loaves and two fish) here to me,’ he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.” Jesus’ miracle doesn’t really need much explanation. As true God, he could provide for that crowd using his little finger.

What do you think the disciples were thinking as he took the boy’s lunch and looked up to heaven and prayed? What would you think if we were all getting ready for the church picnic, and ONE SMALL HOTDISH was on the table? What if the pastor said, “OK, it’s time to say grace. Everyone gather around!” Did the disciples have the same looks on their faces that you would have at that picnic? Yet Jesus made it enough to satisfy everyone’s hunger completely, not just give a snack.

We see more amazing things in the aftermath: “*The disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*” What a miracle that there were far more leftovers than what they had even started with! As someone once said, “There was one basket of leftovers that day for each clergyman who thought that it couldn’t be done!”

2 – Those are the amazing details of that sack lunch that was packed long ago. So now we have to take this account and apply it directly to our life today. What lessons do you learn from this account?

First, learn a lesson from the crowds. You must admit that your physical needs and problems are exactly like that crowd’s needs every day. And you are helpless to fill those needs. What are your needs?

- You require daily food. Your need for daily food is exactly like the people of yesteryear. You

crave a meal about three times a day, and will be supremely cranky and uncomfortable if you miss one, or most certainly a day’s worth.

- You require clean water to drink, even more than you need food.
- You require shelter in a safe place to live.
- You need a way to keep yourself clean.
- You need sanitation and sewer.
- You need transportation
- You need regular and emergency medical care.
- And much more!

God can tend to fill these so completely for you, that you may not give the things I mentioned a second thought! There may be children here today that have been so well provided for by their God and by their parents that these things have never been a concern to them. Along with these, you might even have:

- High speed internet
- The chance to get take out or eat at a restaurant regularly
- More than one family vehicle, or a vehicle in the parking lot that is pretty excellent
- More than one bathroom at home
- Retirement savings

God has richly and daily given us what we need for our life!

Secondly, we learn a lesson from the disciples in this account. After all, they should have had a better answer for Jesus when he talked with them. These were the men who had gone to the wedding at Cana with him when they ran out of wine. How was that problem resolved? They were the ones who had gone on the recent mission trip, on which they had followed Jesus’

command not to take anything extra for the trip. Their needs would be provided for. Yet when asked about what they were going to do about the food problem that day, their eyes wandered from the face of the Son of God who was there right in front of them and looked to their own hands as the only solution. This mistaken focus led to two sinful words that are not to enter a Christian's vocabulary:

- The "d" word = **Doubt**
- The "w" word = **Worry**

For the disciples, who were good at math, Jesus did this miracle for a special reason. John writes that he did it to "test" them. He also calls this miracle a SEMEION. Miracles are called different things in the Bible. The word SEMEION literally means a "sign."

This act was a sign to strengthen their faith in their providing Lord!

Do the "d" word and the "w" word cross your mind? Perhaps:

- When you think of the mortgage payment that isn't so easy to make now
- When you hear the price of groceries will be going up, and there's not a few people in your household
- When your benefits might be cut
- When your job might be lost
- When sickness comes, and treatment will be needed

Will Jesus send you on your way and say, "Find something yourself"? No way! His compassion would never allow it, and the promises of Scripture assure us otherwise. If the groceries are more, if the job is lost, or if sickness comes, the Lord's promise will remain true. We must realize that he will help in his time and way, just as

the disciples didn't know the inside story at the time, but we know he will provide!

What is the proof of this? Romans 8 tells us, "*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*" The proof is in how God has provided for you as a sinner. When you were lost in your sinful condition – including the sins of doubt and worry – God planned your salvation and sent his only Son to die for you on the cross. When you did not deserve it as a child of wrath, God saved your soul through Jesus Christ. And now he even tells you, "*See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*" (Matthew 6:28-30)

Why does he let you struggle at times? Just like the disciples, it is so you can see your own inadequacies and deficiencies. It shows you that you will always need him.

A third lesson lies in the broken pieces of bread that remained after the feeding of the 5000 had ended. What would a good American call what needed to be picked up in baskets after it was all over? He'd say, "Of course it's good to pick up the trash." I think it's noteworthy today to look at those "leftovers" and remember that the Lord was providing for another day with them. Leftovers are not a lack of blessing. Or using another modern picture, garage sales are not a lack of God's providing either. How good it is for us to think about that when we are tempted to an attitude of complaining, because we can't have everything we want. How good it is for us to remember that when we feel like being wasteful, for God provides for us with leftovers as well as the brand new.

Before we close, it would be good to think about our church for a moment. What about how God provides for his Christians in a congregation? What about Holy Trinity?

For those of you who have served on a board or committee here at Holy Trinity or who simply have been members for a while, you know what the most popular agenda item at most church meetings can be. In it is the agenda item that some people are waiting for, and prick up their ears the most attentively to hear about? An update on the Youth Group? The latest list of fellowship events coming up? No, it's the money situation. It can consume a congregation. Some can even use it as the only or the main indicator of the health of a church.

Think about the past. Did God provide adequately for Holy Trinity in the 1970's and 1980's? Did God fail to provide for his people? Should we worry about that this morning? I don't think anyone even wonders about that anymore.

How about the 90's and 2000's? If you walk around our facility and campus with a visitor and try to convince them that God has been stingy and held back on us, I think you'd have a hard time convincing them of this.

So here's the harder question, as we sit here as Philips and Andrews: What about the future? When you operate in the lopsided world of the "fat" days of school/holiday times vs. the leaner times of summer and vacations, this time of year can produce the feeling that God is not providing his people with resources to give their firstfruit offerings, or opening their hearts to do so.

Two verses are worth keeping in mind as we think about this:

- *"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." (Proverbs 16:3)*
- *"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will*

also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." (1 Cor. 9:10,11)

You can't outgive God. Try to do it, if you haven't! I'd submit that he can and will provide for our church's needs through you so abundantly that we will even be able to distribute food to those who come to us in need as well.

Why will he let us struggle at times along the way? Just like the disciples, it is so we can see our own inadequacies and deficiencies. It shows you that we will always need him.

Finally, I guess I have things to think about when I'm making lunches this next school year. I can think of five loaves and two fish. I can think of the feeding of the 5000. And I can know confidently that God will provide for my family's needs and my church's needs. For his promises are true! Amen.