

“Feeding the Multitude”  
Based on Luke 9: 10-17  
by Rev. Meghan Davis  
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A little backstory before we get into today’s scripture. Earlier in the chapter, the author of Luke relates “Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money -- not even an extra tunic.”<sup>1</sup> So the Twelve set out and did as Jesus commanded. They healed and they preached.

That’s where today’s passage picks up. The apostles returned to Jesus, eager to tell Jesus and the others all about what had happened and all they did and saw. Jesus takes them to a private location, presumably for retreat, relaxation and a chance to de-brief. But they don’t get that chance, because word gets around that Jesus is there and before they know it, Jesus is preaching and healing again. (A Messiah’s work is never done.)

Like paparazzi, the crowds descended upon Jesus and the others. Jesus must have been tired. He must have been weary, he must have been ready for some down time with his friends, and yet, Luke tells us that he welcomed the crowds and taught and healed them. I can imagine I would have wanted to hide, I might have asked them to come back tomorrow—surely the teaching and the healing could wait one day. But not Jesus. I’m thinking this is what some would label a not particularly healthy model of ministry: satisfying all others at ones’ own expense. But— But—he’s Jesus! The point isn’t necessarily that we need to give and give and give until we burn out—remember, Jesus does frequently succeed in finding peace and quiet for prayer time—the point is, we are all called to ministry, we are called to a spiritual life and we are called to teach and learn, heal and meet the needs—both material and spiritual—of those around us, not only when we feel like it, not only when it’s convenient to do so, but whenever a need presents itself.

As it got later and night was approaching, the disciples urged Jesus, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” Do you wonder why they say this? Is it out of genuine concern for the crowd? Do they really think that the people would stick around forever as long as Jesus was still teaching and preaching, like crowds at a rock concert trying to get one more encore out the band with their screaming and applause, refusing to leave until the

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:1-3

lights come up and it's clear that "Elvis has left the building"? Most commentaries give the disciples the benefit of the doubt that they were indeed concerned for the people. But I wonder if it's because they are tired and hungry. *They're* ready to relax, and eat, and have some quality time with Jesus. Perhaps it's a bit of both—concern for the crowds and concern for themselves.

But regardless of their motivation, Jesus is having none of it. "You give them something to eat," he says. What does he mean? Did he truly expect them to be able to manage the feat he was about to perform? He gave them the power to heal but did he give them the power to multiply bread and fish, something they wouldn't even imagine Jesus could do, much less themselves? Was he trying once again to get across to them that they, too, could do these mighty works in God's name? Was he thinking, "do I have to do everything?"

I can imagine the disciples looking around at each other, confused. The poor disciples don't have a clue what Jesus is talking about. "You expect us to share our food? But we barely have enough to feed ourselves, as it is. Do you want us to go out and buy food for these five thousand people? But we don't have any money, and even if we had *SOME* money, we'd never have *that much* money. What do you want from us?"

So Jesus says, I'm guessing with a sigh, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." And they do. It seems to me that just that part is miracle enough. Can you imagine trying to get five thousand people organized into five hundred groups of fifty? Can you imagine in a time without loud-speakers, the chaos that must have been? But somehow, they manage to get all the people separated into groups, and Jesus took "the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd." And we're not told exactly how it happened. At what point were the bread and fish multiplied? Was it that people would take a piece and it just never got smaller? We don't know. And we don't need to know because it's not important. What's important is that "all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces." All ate and were filled and there were still pieces left over. There is plenty to go around. There is plenty to go around when we all work together, there is plenty to go around when we all work for God.

So why are we having communion and new members and ordaining and installing officers and this First (Hopefully) Annual Loaves and Fishes Sunday? This story, one of the few to appear in all four Gospels, has great significance. This story serves as a foreshadowing of the Last Supper, which of course, we celebrate in the sacrament of communion. The unending bounty of the loaves and fish is like the unending bounty of God's grace. Jesus spoke to the crowds about

the Kingdom of God and then Jesus gave them an example, an enacted parable of what God's Reign is like.

Jesus' command here is pretty clear: You give them something to eat. Our ministries with Fish and Community House are wonderful ways this church family fulfills that commandment by literally feeding God's children. But how else can we be feeding the crowds? How else can we feed people spiritually? How else can we help people lead whole lives—both those within and beyond our church walls? How can we be more attentive to the needs of others? How can we be more welcoming to those in need, even if they seem to be appearing at an inconvenient time? Let us each prayerfully consider: could I make a little more of a commitment to welcoming those in our midst in need? Could I make a little more commitment to serving God by serving others through the church?

When our new members are officially received into this church family, they are joining our little group of “about fifty” formed in the crowd. They are committing to be part of this ministry. They are committing to continuing their journeys of faith with us. Committing to Seek Christ's Way with us. As our officers are ordained and installed, they are committing to leadership roles within the ministry. They are committing to the ministry of this church and most importantly, they are committing to the ministry of Jesus Christ. We celebrate that ministry in communion, we celebrate it in receiving new members, ordaining and installing officers, and we celebrate it in our collection for Fish and our other ministries.