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'Enough IS Enough!' (Matthew 14:13-21)

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While I was in Seminary, I took a class titled 'Intro to Counseling.' The essential secret is good listening! Listening with close attention to what someone has to say. I remember being taught that the most important things someone needed to share would come out near the end of time spent together.

I have found this to be generally true! When visiting people in Nursing or Retirement homes, or those confined mostly to their own homes, it is after people share with me their pictures and momentos. It is after the prayer I offer before I depart, that important issues or concerns are voiced. I've been trying to improve my listening skills all my life!

Today's story of the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle that's included in all four gospels in our Bible. It's told twice in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew! In these stories of the feeding of the 5000, there are hints of Communion: Jesus followed the form of the Communion Service we will share today. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, thanks God for it, breaks it and shares it.

This event convinced so many people that Jesus was someone very special. Somehow or other, five barley loaves and two fish become a meal enough to feed all those people. Barley loaves were the food of the poor. Yet this food from the poorest of people was enough!

Jesus is always concerned about the needs of those people he encountered, often sensing people without focus, not really knowing where they're going. People who needed spiritual food.

In today's Gospel, Jesus sees people who are physically hungry. So, he satisfies the need of the people. As we know from the pyramid of human needs, it is hard for physically hungry people to listen, understand or learn. This is the reason that free or reduced breakfast, lunch programs, our own FORK program were started at public schools! Mahatma Ghandi once said, "There are people in the world so hungry That God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread!"

Later in the Gospels, after their immediate needs are met, Jesus offers them the 'Bread of Life.' But today, Jesus sees people who are hungry. He feeds them with life nourishing bread: bread which is broken, blessed and shared. Bread which symbolizes his body with which he does ministry.

Communion is a unique time of blessing for anyone who shares it, because you are given food which meets both physical hunger and spiritual hunger. You are gifted with the Bread of Life: which is for Christians, Jesus.

The feeding of the 5000 happened during springtime, when there is an abundance of grass in Israel. The times I visited Israel/Palestine (always during summer,) there was not a lot of grass. It only rains between April and October in the region.

Much like the world is over-abundant in springtime, with new plants, flowers, leaves, buds and baby animals; the Feeding of the 5000 was also over-abundant. Remember, there wasn't just enough food to satisfy everyone's hunger, there was enough food left over to fill an extra 12 baskets!!

We'll never know exactly what happened as all those people were fed. There are many interpretations. Some think of the event as a kind of supernatural miracle. Five loaves of bread and 2 fish were touched by Jesus and were multiplied, able to feed thousands. Others believe that everyone present simply shared what little they had brought with them, whether a small or large offering, and everyone was satisfied. In a world where we are all apt to hold tight to what is ours, and painfully slow to share, THAT would be as amazing an event as any!

I once read a wonderful story about a Lutheran Synod meeting! The evening before the meeting, terrible storms blew through the area. The city lost electrical power. Evidence of the storm was all around. Whole oak trees had been pulled up by their roots. The power did click on in some places at 1 a.m..

Unfortunately, the hotel in which the Synod meeting was to be held was still without power. 700 Lutherans would be driving into town in a few hours. How would they feed them all if there was no power? They called every Lutheran church in town and asked them to put out a call for charcoal grills. They planned to set the grills up on the football field and make sure everyone was fed!

Augustana College, in Rock Island, IL., had everything well in hand. When the organizers arrived a little before seven o'clock, the power was ON, although they were just minutes away from renting a refrigerated truck to preserve the food.

In the end, 700 Lutherans were fed in the usual way that weekend, having no ideas how close they came to being part of a miracle much like the one of those who followed Jesus experienced so long ago!

Jesus, the Wonder Bread of life, said often, "If you have eyes, use them. And if you have ears, listen and hear the truth." Let's work on seeing and listening, especially as we journey through this Coronavirus time. After all, when we work with God, we can throw out the expected! We can still dream big dreams whatever our situation may be or with whatever we have available: no matter how challenging, small or seemingly unimportant. God, that Force of Good in the universe, uses whenever or whatever is available!

Is there a story in your life where God worked with the little you had to do something amazing and powerful? Theologian and author Fred Buechner believes that God is found in the stories of our lives. When we find God, we find truth, no matter where on our life's journey that may be!

And as we say in the United Church of Christ, "Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!" May the God of Good be with YOU as you journey! Amen.

