

**Lectionary 17 Ninth Sunday after Pentecost Year B 2021**  
**July 25, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sometimes I find myself tempted to gloss over the miracle stories about Jesus that are recorded in the Gospels; perhaps you do too. Taken at face value, they draw out our skepticism, challenging us to believe something that we might otherwise be inclined to explain away through other means. But these stories *are* a big part of the Gospels, and so they're hard to write off, especially today's story of the feeding of the 5,000.

This story of the feeding of the 5,000 stands out in the Gospels. It's one of only a few stories that appears in all four gospels. But this story is more than a miracle story. In the Gospel writers' hands, this miracle also becomes a parable. The feeding of the 5,000 can be viewed as a parable about who we are called to be and what we are called to do. As we live as disciples in this world, at some point, Jesus is going to turn to us and say, "You give them something to eat." Jesus calls us in our own lives to feed and share our gifts with those around us.

The more we begin to imagine the world around this gospel story, the more we see that it's not about magic at all. It's about how we see the world, and what we do with what we already have. In a way, the magic has already happened: God has already given us a world out of nothing, already provided sun and earth and water and seeds. That's all the magic we need. Everything we have and everything around us comes from God and will return to God.

God provides all that we need. From the beginning of creation, to manna in the wilderness, to Elisha and the crowd, and finally to our gospel reading today as Jesus feeds the disciples, God provides an abundance for us. As Jesus feeds the crowd, he takes what God has already provided, drawing out the resources that are already present in the community.

In each of the Gospels, either Jesus or one of the disciples asks the question, "Where are we to buy bread to feed the crowd?" (In the Gospel of John, the only one where Jesus asks this question, John points out that Jesus only asks the question in order to test the disciples.) In the other Gospels, when the disciples ask this question, Jesus responds, simply telling them, "You give them something to eat." But of course, the disciples can see that feeding so many people would be impossible.

As Andrew points out in John's Gospel, all they can find is five barley loaves and two fish belonging to a boy in the crowd. But then, Jesus gets them to see the situation with a new perspective. The disciples were coming to the situation from a place of fear and scarcity: there will never be enough! Six month's wages would not buy enough bread to feed them. But what Jesus shows the disciples, and what Jesus shows us, is that whatever we have—whatever God has already given us—it is always enough, we just need the right perspective. God calls us to share. God calls us to let go of our fears of scarcity, and to stop holding on to what's "ours" so tightly. As God enables us to do focus on one another and the community around us, we realize that we absolutely have enough bread to feed the world.

Instead of viewing 5,000 people on the lakeshore as a problem—"How will we *ever* be able to feed this many people?"—perhaps God is inviting us to view it more like a party. There's a bunch of people gathered, enjoying the sunset on the lakeshore and the cool evening breeze. And God has provided an abundance for us. Whatever we have brought with us is what we have to share, and there's plenty for everyone while still having some leftover. This is what the Kingdom of God looks like.

This party, this gathering by the lakeshore where 5,000 are fed is one of the many meals that Jesus shares with his disciples. In addition to the Last Supper, there are dozens of suppers in the Gospels. Jesus sat down and broke bread with his followers many times over the course of his ministry. And every time Jesus broke bread with friends, it was a eucharistic meal—a meal of thanksgiving.

Jesus follows the very same pattern in this supper as he does at the Last Supper. Our Gospel tells us, “Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.” Or as the Gospel of Mark tells it, “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people.” Take, bless, break, give. These are the actions of the eucharistic feast. These are the actions that Jesus used with the 5,000, that he used at the Last Supper, and they are the same actions that Jesus uses with our bread in the eucharist this morning. And this is ultimately what Jesus does with his very own life. Jesus lives his life for God, breaks it open, and gives it to us, to all the world.

Take, bless, break, give. God calls us, too, to take what we have, whatever it may be, whatever God has provided for us, and bless it: in other words, give it up to God. And then we break it open, and give it away joyfully to all those in need. In doing so, God promises that there will be an abundance, and that it will be enough for all.

We are called to be generous. We are called to let our lives and our actions follow this same, generous pattern. Jesus tells us, “You give them something to eat.” Take, bless, break, give. God invites us to join together in service and share our lives and possessions with the world around us. But we all know this can be difficult. It involves being vulnerable—maybe by sharing money that we had put aside for a rainy day, or by opening ourselves up to see and know those we serve as individuals that have been beaten down by the sinfulness of our world. We see the ways in which we have perpetuated this sinfulness, and the ways that we have stood silently while others have suffered. This vulnerability is what it means to be broken open. It’s far easier to stay where it’s comfortable, never facing that reality, but God calls us to something more.

God calls us to generosity, and by living generously, we experience God’s abundance. Take, bless, break, give. No matter how hard or impossible it may seem, the end result is worth it: everyone ate until they were satisfied, and there was more than enough to go around. God has given us all that we need, right in our midst. And so, God calls us to join in the work of the Kingdom, to live generously, and to experience the abundance God has provided. Thanks be to God. Amen.