

## *Easter People*

Let's set the stage . . . Jesus had just learned of the death of his friend and cousin, John the Baptist. Like most us in that situation, he simply wanted to find a quiet place to mourn. But the crowds kept following him and wouldn't leave him alone. And the crowd was so big he had to feed them. But you know, I think that through this moment of compassion, Jesus actually found his grief fading.

And I think the same is true for us. When times are tough, I think we feel better when we are in community with others. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, this miracle story tells us of the compassionate Jesus who responds to people in need . . .

Prayer for illumination: Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from your mouth. Make us hungry for this heavenly food, that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

I invite you now to open your Bibles to hear the holy word of God, for what we believe to be the truth for our lives and everyday living.

Matthew 14: 13-21

*Now when Jesus heard of John the Baptist's death, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God . . .

Fish and bread, again . . . ? If you lived around the Sea of Galilee, the meal certainly wouldn't seem like a culinary treat. Most folks were likely sick of the Surf & Grain Combo Pack. A few measly grilled fish. A couple of circles of barley bread. A little olive oil, maybe dusted with salt, to dip the bread and the fish. Meals didn't get any more routine or ordinary. Everyone on the hillside that day had eaten a dinner like that far, far more times than they could begin to count.

Except that this wasn't an everyday meal. The entrée was indeed ordinary. But the Host and Chef is extra-ordinary. Memorable. Ground-breaking. Life-changing. So much so that we sacramentally re-enact His community meal today . . .

The disciples remembered this meal. Every gospel, whether written by one of the apostles or told to interviewer, includes this meal. You can see why. Picture the scene. Pretend you've arranged this enormous crowd of people into their seating assignments on the meadow. Picture the curious glances and funny looks as you orchestrate thousands of folks into little community groups. Jesus blesses a measly box lunch and hands the baskets to you. Then imagine dipping your hand in a basket as you go from family to family, picnic blanket to picnic blanket, and every time you dip your hand in the basket it seems fuller than the time before. Because it is!

The disciples remembered the awe of picking up baskets of leftovers. They remembered the shock of realizing they'd not only seen a miracle, they'd participated in it. But not only because it was forerunner to an episode of Dinner Impossible. Something else took place. They saw it on the faces. They heard the excitement in the conversation. The buzz of the crowd was tangible. Because Jesus created not only fed the crowd a meal – Jesus fed the bigger hunger for community . . .

And Jesus feeds our community now. For because of Easter, you and I are fed with an eternal promise. Because of Easter, death is conquered. Because of Easter, the craving for hope has been satisfied. Because of Easter, the famine for assurance has passed. Because of Easter, the ravenous hunger for grace and compassion and loving acceptance has been filled. Jesus feeds our community with the joy of life together, and we are now the Easter community; we are now the fed Easter people called to feed others.

Just before he ascended into heaven, the disciples had one last breakfast with Jesus on the shores of that same Sea of Galilee. Right there, at the site of that astounding miracle Jesus turned the tables. Like before he fed the disciples fish and bread. But then he said, "*Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep.*" In a sense Jesus said, "*You know, the point of the miracle wasn't the meal. The point was gathering the crowd. And you fed them through me before, and as Easter people, you will feed them again.*"

And Jesus has turned the dinner table on us too. We are in the very same place as the disciples. Jesus has fed others through us before. And as Easter people, we are called to feed them again.

So what's in your basket? How are you feeding the flock? How are you feeding the hunger for community? Maybe you're helping with the *Meet and Eat* program. Maybe you're providing *Fellowship Snacks and Goodies*. Maybe you're a part of the *Marion Cares* program, or signed up for Pastor Bill's *Flood Recovery Work Day*. Maybe you haven't dipped your hand in your basket yet. But if not, it's time . . .

So go and feed the sheep with confidence. Go and let the Master Chef foster new communities through you. For just like the amazed disciples on that meadow, Jesus Christ empowers Easter People to feed communities of 5000 and communities of 5. And with overflowing baskets in hand we do just that . . .

So rub your tummy. The hunger is satisfied. The famine of hope is replaced with overflowing leftovers. Jesus has fed us. And fed disciples are called to feed others . . .

Amen.