

A Jesus Happy Meal

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Scripture:

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

Matthew 14:13-21

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“When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is 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 to go away; you give them something to eat.’”

Let us pray.

Food is at the center of our lives; not only as a source of sustainability, but also as an element in celebrations, good and bad meetings...even funerals.

I grew up in a household where we were taught that food was not a privilege, but a right. Hence, “no one should be denied a plate of food.” In fact, there is an expression in Puerto Rico that says “you do not remind anyone that you gave them a plate of food.” “Un plato de la comida no se saca en cara a nadie.”

One of my aunts tells a story of a time where there was a tropical storm in Puerto Rico over 50 years ago, that, in its aftermath, left many without homes.

During that time, my paternal grandmother cooked big pots of rice and fed anyone who would come by. The need was so dire, my aunt shares, that there were lines of people from the neighborhood coming to get something to eat.

She was a young girl then. She remembers my grandmother asking the families to send the children to the front of the line.

Food is something that most of us take for granted, as it is accessible to us. And certainly, we do not believe that this almost unlimited access to food is a miracle.

In the gospel lesson this morning, we find Jesus withdrawing in a boat to a deserted place.

He was withdrawing from the multitude because he was grieving. He had just learned of the death of John the Baptist.

However, as he attempted to be in solitude, the crowds heard about it and followed him.

And after a day of ministering to the crowds, the pragmatic disciples approached Jesus 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 replied, “They need not go away; **you** give them something to eat.” This is the very well-known story of the loaves and fishes.

This is the only of Jesus’ miracles that was recorded in all four gospels. I perhaps trust that most of us know that the disciples replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”

I’m sure that the disciples were perplexed at this proposition. **You** give them something to eat. Over 5,000 people—5 loaves and 2 fish.

So, Jesus proceeded to do what we are about to do in just a few minutes, “Take, bless, break, and give.”

It is important to note that the world of the first-century Roman Empire was marked by significant inequalities relative to food access.

Food access reflected the elite’s access to power and controlled resources. “Lack of food was one of the ways many people experienced the injustice of this disparity of power.”¹

However, throughout scripture we see a God that is always willing and able to feed the people.

Beyond all of this, I invite us to look at this story as more than just a miracle of bread and fish.

It had been a long day and the disciples thought of the most practical thing to do ~ to send thousands of people back to their villages hungry, that they could get food for themselves.

Jesus’ surprising response, “You give them something to eat.” “You feed them.”

In this story, Jesus instructs his disciples, “Bring me what you have. Bring me the 5 loaves and 2 fish.”

Here in North America, we begin from a position of scarcity. The scarcity narrative informs us that we need to preserve what we have and strive for more. “*We need more money, we need more buildings, we need more...*”

To feed the hungry people of a neighborhood, at a time when a storm had devastated the island like my grandmother did, was countercultural. It was an act of faith and hope.

This morning, we are called to be countercultural to bring God what we have, so that it can be “taken, blessed, broken, and given.”

¹ Warren Carter, Commentary on Matthew 14:13-21

Because more than just a miracle to “awe” us and “wow” us, this story calls us to discipleship. I can only imagine how this experience transformed the disciples’ lives.

Because there is something powerful about feeding others. There is something transformative when we serve our brothers and sisters who are in need.

If we do it without fear, but with compassion; if our faith and hope is the motivation, we will also be broken and blessed, and will be able to give of ourselves, and surely, we will not be the same.

But when we begin from the pragmatic standpoints, we miss the fact that we, too, are hungry. We miss God’s economy of abundance.

For it is in giving that we are most satisfied.

Perhaps we can be a conduit of such miracles of multiplication, when we pay attention to our own cravings -- to our own hunger.

And maybe we can join the prophet Isaiah in praying “why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good.”

And it is in this story that we found a balance meal ~ a meal with protein and carbohydrates. A meal filled with compassion and love. A meal that provided the disciples with an opportunity to be fed as they served.

A meal that was more than a meal, it was a call and a lesson...it was transformation of the minds and souls. It was a meal that changed the perceptions of God and brought understanding of our purpose. It was a meal that took the eyes off of “self” and directed them to our neighbor. It was a meal that made our own cravings more pronounced and God’s ability to feed them real.

For when our spirit is fed, we experience God’s abundance.

May the God of miracles, lessons, and compassion lead us to trust that God will not turn anyone away hungry. Amen.